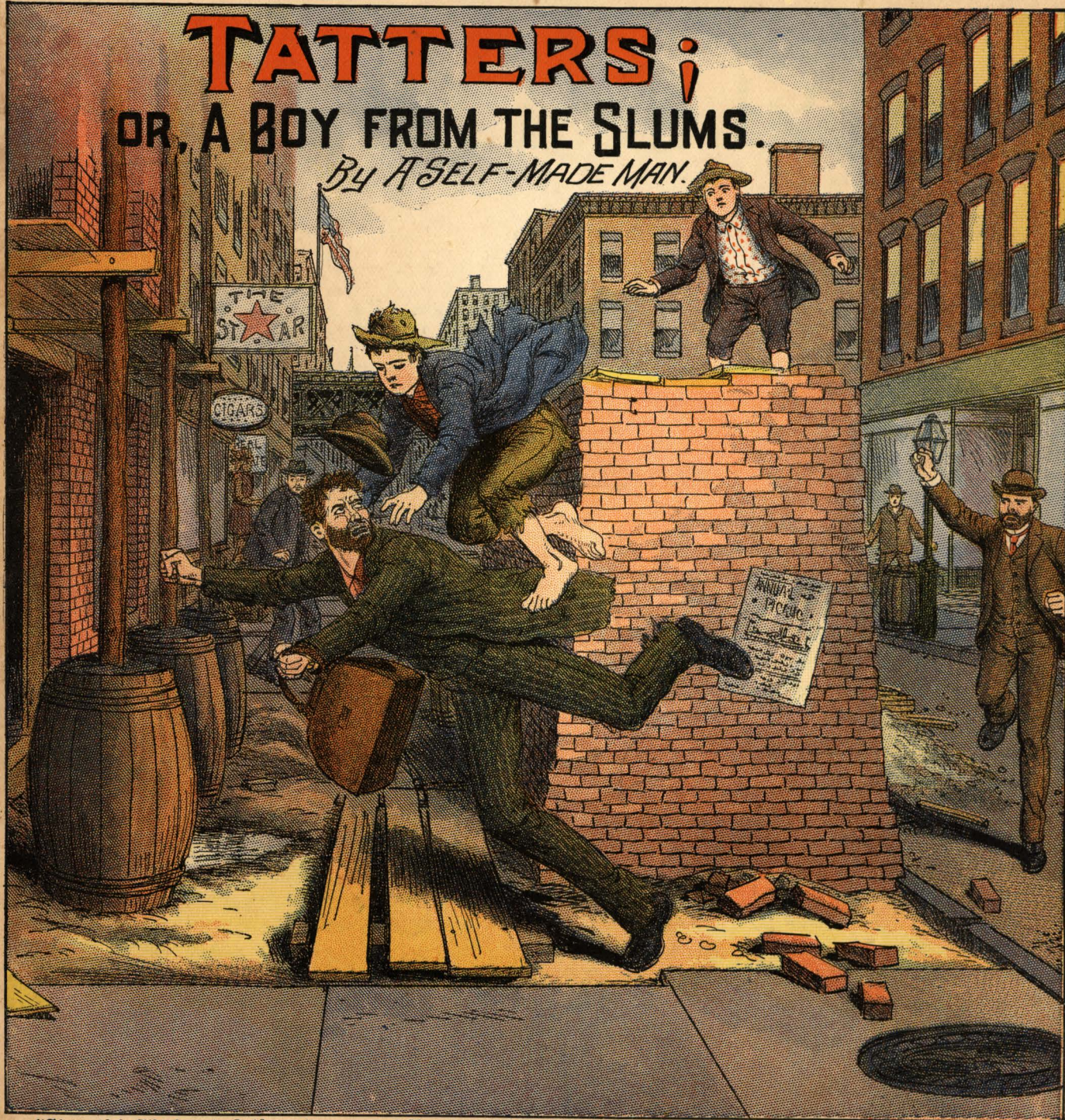


FAME AND FORTUNE WEEKLY.

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY.

TATTERS; OR, A BOY FROM THE SLUMS.

By A SELF-MADE MAN.



"Stop thief!" shouted the stranger, following him. The rascal darted around the brick pile with the intention of hiding inside of the unfinished buildings. "No yer don't, cull!" cried Tatters, springing from his perch and landing on the fellow's back.

Fame and Fortune Weekly

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

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TATTERS;

OR,

A BOY FROM THE SLUMS.

By A SELF-MADE MAN.

CHAPTER I.

CALEB TARTAR'S LODGING-HOUSE FOR BOYS.

"Where's Tatters?" cried a tough, thirteen-year-old specimen of humanity known as "Butts," whose real name was Jack Drew. "Any of youse fellers seen him ter-night?"

"Nixy," answered Henry Smith, aged fourteen, better known as "Bermudas."

His reply filled the bill.

Not one of the dozen ill-dressed, not over-clean boys, whose ages ran from eleven years to fourteen, gathered for shelter and a night's rest in Caleb Tartar's cellar in Water Street, New York, had seen Tatters.

It was a miserable, rainy night, the hour was midnight, and Caleb Tartar had just started to close up the entrance, a pair of ricketty wooden flaps working on hinges, over a short flight of stone steps, to his "Boys' lodging house."

Wretched quarters, indeed, for any one to call home—a long, low, narrow basement, with bare stone walls and flooring thickly strewn with straw, the only cot being the one used by Tartar himself, with a small, iron stove in a far corner, while the sole illumination came from a cheap candle

fastened to a small shelf on the wall—but it was the only home these boys knew.

"Hold on, Caleb!" shouted Butts, from his own particular heap of straw. "Tatters ain't come yet. Yer don't want ter shut him out sich a night as this, does yer?"

"Hain't he come yet?" asked the landlord of the lodgings.

"Nope."

"Then he stays out," growled Tartar. "He knows the rules of this establishment. We close up at twelve, and no one gets in afterward."

"Oh, come off, Caleb!" protested Butts. "Give him a show."

"Give him nothin'. A rule is a rule. Who's runnin' this shebang? Me or you kids?"

"Youse is runnin' it, I s'pose; but yer don't want ter keep one of yer reg'lars out jest 'cause he happens ter be behind time."

"It's his lookout, not mine," was Tartar's reply, as he let down the one flap, which had been open, and locked it with a padlock.

Then he shuffled across the floor to his own quarters, and partially disrobing got into his cot and wrapped himself in his old army blanket.

"Well, wot does yer t'ink of dat, fellers?" exclaimed Butts, in a tone of disgust.

"It's meaner'n dirt," chorused his companions.

Tartar heard this comment upon his action, but it didn't bother him.

He simply gave a grunt and turned over in his cot.

"Caleb Tartar, you're a mean old stuff!" cried Butts.

"That's wot he is!" came from the straw in different quarters.

Tartar covered his head with the blanket to shut out these uncomplimentary remarks.

"Will yer listen ter dat rain!" remarked Butts, after a silence of two minutes.

It was coming down now in torrents, and the wind from the river swept it up against the fronts of the buildings.

"A fine night ter be out in, ain't it, fellers?"

"It's soakin' t'rough on der steps," said an urchin named Billy Moss, who blacked boots for a living.

"If it keeps on at dat rate we'll all have ter swim out," spoke up a newsboy named Tommy Dodd, who was a cripple.

Caleb Tartar preferred this kind of night, for it generally provided him with a full house.

He charged the boys five cents apiece, strictly in advance, for the privilege of passing the hours of darkness in his cellar lodgings.

He was a miser, and for this reason, combined with his other bad qualities, the boys had no friendly feeling for him.

"If Tatters shows up soon and wants ter get in I move dat we bu'st der door open an' let him in," suggested Bermudas, sitting up in his straw bed.

"Dat's wot I say," agreed Billy Moss.

"Hello, there!" roared Tartar, who had overheard what Bermudas said. "If you kids don't shut up and go to sleep, I'll take a stick to you."

"Yes, yer will, I don't t'ink!" replied Moss, ironically.

"Who spoke?" demanded Tartar, in a sudden rage, sitting up. "Was that you, Tommy Dodd?"

"No, it wasn't me," answered Tommy, who was cuddled up close to Moss.

"I say it was you. I know your voice. If I hear another word from you I'll put you out into the street, d'ye hear?"

"I didn't say not'in'," replied Tommy, who stood in great fear of the old man.

"You will answer back when I told you to shut up, will you? Now out you go in two minutes, and you don't get your money back, either. I'll learn you kids not to sass me."

The boys heard Tartar get out of his cot and start to put his clothes on.

They all knew that he meant business when he got started, and Tommy Dodd, who had to hobble about with the aid of one crutch, was terrified.

"Say, fellers, do we stand ter have der cripple put out inter der storm?" sang out Butts, aggressively.

There was a momentary silence and then a chorus of "Noes."

"Der old man has stood on our necks long enough. It's time dat we put a stop ter it," continued Butts, groping about in the straw.

"Wot yer goin' ter do, Butts?" asked Bermudas.

"T'row me shoe at his head ter begin wit'," answered Butts. "Fellers, when I give der word, fire one of yer shoes at him. If dat don't stop him, t'row der udder. Den if he wants some more we'll jump on him and sit on his back till he gives in."

Tartar now came shuffling toward the spot where he knew Tommy Dodd lay.

As soon as he got half way, where the candle threw its light upon his spare figure, Butts roared:

"Let him have it!"

Whiz—swish—whiz!

Eight shoes flew through the air, and every one hit its mark.

Tartar was taken completely by surprise and he went down on the floor.

He was up again in a moment, swearing like a trooper, and glared about the cellar, but every boy was lying down.

Only the old man's oaths and the rain outside broke the stillness.

"I'll put you all out, you pestiferous imps!" howled Caleb Tartar. "I'll lick you, Tommy Dodd, to begin with, for you're the cause of all the trouble."

He started again for Tommy's locality.

As soon as his back was turned to the majority of the boys there was another movement in the straw behind him.

Whiz—swish—whiz!

Eight more shoes played a lively tattoo on Tartar's back and head.

He stopped and turned around, but every boy had vanished into the straw again.

"I'll pay you well for this, you little villains!" he roared, furiously.

A chorus of snickers rose from the straw.

Tartar shook his fist at his young lodgers and then reached for the cripple boy.

"Come out of that, Tommy Dodd. Come out and make tracks for the street, d'ye hear me?"

"I ain't done not'in'," whispered Tommy.

"Come out!"

"Yer ain't got no right ter put me out," protested Tommy. "I've paid me lodgin'."

"I don't keer whether you've paid or hain't paid, you've got to go when I says the word. I don't allow nobody to sass me back."

"I never opened me mout'," asserted Tommy, truthfully.

"I say you did. I heard you. If you don't move I'll pull you out by the feet."

Tartar bent down to seize the cripple's leg, when something alighted on the top of his back and bore him to the floor.

That something was the agile Butts.

Bermudas, who was much heavier, followed, and Tartar grunted as his weight struck him in the small of the back.

Several of the other boys piled on until the old man was straddled from his neck to his feet.

"Now will youse be good, Caleb?" asked Butts, with a chuckle.

The cellar-door key had dropped from Tartar's fingers and Bermudas accidentally put his bare toes on it.

"I've got the key, fellers," he shouted, as he picked it up.

Tartar wriggled around in a vain attempt to unseat his tormentors, and what he didn't do to the English language isn't worth mentioning.

But the boys had him at their mercy, and Butts proposed to teach the old miser a lesson.

The rain had died away outside, and the wind, too, seemed to have subsided.

"Are yer goin' ter let Tommy alone, Caleb?" asked Butts, grabbing the old man by the ears.

"He's got to get out," insisted Caleb. "And the lot of you will go with him."

"Don't yer fool yerself, Caleb. Nobody goes out ter-night, and if yer don't go quietly back ter bed we'll tie yer up an' t'row yer inter ther pool of water close to ther stairs, see?"

"I'll be the death of you, Jack Drew, for this," snarled Tartar.

"No, yer won't. Yer won't do not'in' ter me. Yer knows better dan dat."

At that moment there arose outside a wild clatter of footsteps and a confusion of sounds.

"Hello, wot's der matter outside?" asked Bermudas, leaping off Tartar's back and running to the foot of the dripping steps.

Above the uproar came the wild shriek of a girl.

"Hully gee!" cried Butts. "Dere's somet'in' doin' outside, or youse kin call me a liar!"

A loud rapping came on the cellar flap, and the well-known voice of Tatters was heard shouting:

"Hi, hi, fellers! I want yer help. Dere's trouble ter burn!"

"There's Tatters!" roared Bermudas. "He's got into a scrimmage. Come on, all of youse!"

He unlocked the padlock, but was careful to put the key in his pocket, and threw open the flap.

The sounds of a conflict in the street, mingled with the shrieks of a girl, came plainly to the ears of the boys below, who, with no thought for their shoes, began to swarm up the stone steps, leaving old Tartar and crippled Tommy to themselves.

CHAPTER II.

THE SCRAP IN WATER STREET.

The flickering gas lamp at the edge of the sidewalk threw a misty light upon the scrap that was going on in front of the building.

Tatters and a well-dressed man were backed up against a truck, standing off four ruffians of the Water Street gang who were attacking them with sticks of wood.

Cowering down beside Tatters was a terrified girl of ten, attired in a neat jacket and hat to match.

On the ground nearby was a shattered umbrella.

The man, down whose strong features trickled a stream of blood from a cut on the side of the head, was defending himself with one of the rungs of the truck, and was hard pressed by three of the rascals, while the fourth was having his hands pretty full trying to overcome Tatters, who was dodging around and tapping him on the head and body every once in a while with a stout bit of wood he had picked out of the gutter.

"Come on, fellers!" shouted Tatters, as soon as he saw his friends coming into sight. "Sail in and knock the stuffin' out'r these toughs."

Butts picked up a stone and shied it at one of the rascals, hitting him on the head and putting him out of the fight for a moment.

The rest of the boys, grabbing up the first thing that came to hand, joined in the melee and began to make things interesting for the Water Street ruffians.

Just as the rascals were beginning to give way, they received reinforcement in the shape of three of their pals, and then the fight grew hotter than ever.

Tatters kept near the little girl and whirled his stick about with telling effect.

He was a stout boy of probably thirteen years, as tough and rugged as they come in the slums.

But he had a strong, good-looking face, with not an evil line in it.

Of his clothes, the least said the better.

They were the cast-off wrecks of better days, full of rents, through which the warm air of summer and the chill blasts of winter came in contact with his brown skin.

Torn and tattered they were indeed, and by his singular costume he was known—Tatters.

For all that, a warm bath and a suit of new clothes would have made him look like a little gentleman, but he never could have acted the part, for the moment he opened his mouth the lingo of the slums flowed between his lips as naturally as water down hill.

He had been bred in the purlieus of the great city, and its customs and manner of talk were strong upon him.

"Take dat, cully!" he cried, whacking a fresh opponent on the shoulder with his weapon and then dodging safely away from a return blow.

"Dat's de way ter fetch him, Tatters!" cried Butts, dashing up alongside of his friend. "I kin lick de stuffin' out'r one of dese toughs meself."

Biff! Whack! Crack!

The two boys and the rascal mixed matters up at a lively rate.

Caleb Tartar's young lodgers put up a game fight, con-

sidering their size, but the superior weight of their opponents was doing them up, when two policemen suddenly appeared on the scene.

One of the ruffians uttered a warning to his companions, and in a moment they scattered to the right and left and took to their heels, leaving Tatters and his crowd masters of the field.

The man and the girl who had been the primary cause of the trouble were instantly surrounded by the boys, and Tatters was importuned to explain the cause of the disturbance.

The policemen, however, forced their way to the front and started to question the man, who was in a fainting condition from the blows he had received.

"I'll tell youse all about it," volunteered Tatters, seeing that the man was in no condition to answer.

"Well, what do you know about it, Tatters?" asked one of the officers, who knew the boy well and knew nothing bad of him.

"It wuz dis way: Dis here gentleman and dis girl," taking the little miss by the hand, a familiarity she did not resent in the least, but rather gazed at him with eyes big with admiration and respect, "come off der Fulton ferryboat awhile ago, see? I wuz passin' erlong at de time an' I seen 'em start ter cross de street. At dat moment t'ree of dem Water Street toughs jumped out from behind a truck, under which dey'd been hidin', and went for dem. I know'd wot deir game wuz. Dey meant ter sand-bag de gent and rob him, so I jest chipped in wid me mout' and give him a warnin', at de same time runnin' up an' catchin' dis girl by de hand so as ter help her get a move on. Den a fourt' tough j'ined in and cut us off so we had ter back up ag'in dis truck. I hollered to me friends in de cellar and dey come out and sailed in, but t'ree more of the gang showed up, an' I guess we'd er got de worst of it if youse cops hadn't come up. Dat's all dere is to it."

"He's a brave lad, officer," said the man, reviving somewhat. "If it hadn't been for him I should have been knocked out, and heaven knows what would have become of my little girl down in this neighborhood."

"I guess it was lucky for you that you ran across Tatters," agreed the officers.

"What do you call him?" asked the man, in some surprise.

"Tatters. That's all the name he has, I guess. At any rate, I never heard he had any other, and I've known him for three years."

"What is your right name, my boy?" asked the gentleman of our hero.

"Tatters is me right name. Dat's all I got, at any rate."

"Is it possible you have no other name?"

The little girl looked her astonishment, too, but she never let go of his head.

"Dat's right. I'm Tatters, and dat's all dere is to it."

"The name fits him all right," grinned the officer. "He's a bundle of rags from head to foot, and I've never known him to look any different."

"Where do you live, my boy?" asked the man, clearly interested in his young saviour.

"In de streets, 'cept at nights, when I bunk in Caleb Tartar's hotel."

"Caleb Tartar's hotel! And where is that?"

"Under dat ship chandler's, dere," replied Tatters, pointing to the open flap of the cellar entrance. "Me and me friends sleep dere nights."

"So you call that a hotel, do you?" said the man, with a smile.

"Yep. It ain't as swell as de Fift' Avenoo, but wot kin youse expect fer a nickel?"

"I should say the charge was very reasonable."

"Well, we don't put on no frills. I'm savin' me money to buy an automobile so I kin take the air in de park, see?"

"It seems to me you are a character. Well, my lad, I'm under great obligations to you——"

"And me friends. Don't forget 'em."

"And your friends, of course, but chiefly yourself. I should be glad to do something for you, if you will let me."

"Youse needn't worry 'bout me. I'm glad dat I queered de gang. Dey is hard cases, an' don't t'ink not'in of tappin' yer on de nut an' goin' t'rough yer clothes. Dat's de way dey live, see?"

"The Water Street gang is the toughest in this neighborhood," explained the officer. "They're crooks, every one of them, and there isn't one but has done time either on the Island or up the river. You may congratulate yourself on having escaped them. They'd as soon drop you into the river as look at you."

The gentleman shuddered and the little girl looked frightened.

"Well, officer, as a favor, I wish you'd go with us as far as the elevated station. I'm in no shape to run any more risk to-night."

"All right, sir."

"Here's a bill for you, my brave boy," said the man, handing Tatters a note. "Here is my card, too. I wish you'd call on me soon. I want to do something for you in return for what you did for my little daughter and myself to-night."

"T'anks for de bill, mister, and I'll keep de keerd till me tailor sends home me new soot, den mebbe I'll do youse de honor of callin' on yer."

"I'd prefer if you'd let me send you to a store where they keep clothes ready made," laughed the man. "Your tailor might keep you waiting too long."

"I dunno, mister. I'm used to dis soot. It fits me easy, an' I shouldn't know meself in anyt'in' else. If it's all de same to youse we'll let it go at dat. 'Dis bill ought to give me an' me friends a nickel apiece all around, so I t'ink de account is 'bout square. Good night, miss. Glad I wuz able to help youse out."

Thus speaking, Tatters backed away, and, followed by Butts, Bermudas and the rest, dived down into Caleb Tartar's cellar, and pulled the trap after them, Bermudas lingering behind to lock it.

CHAPTER III.

TATTERS STANDS TREAT.

Next morning, Tatters and his friends left Caleb Tartar's at half-past six and started in upon a new day's experiences.

Tatters's occupation was that of a bootblack, and his particular associates, Butts and Bermudas, followed the same line of business.

They worked along South Street and adjacent thoroughfares, but trade was never so brisk as to overburden them with nickels.

When the boys emerged from the Water Street basement they made for a neighboring horse-trough and washed up in a very primitive fashion, then they were ready to flock to a cheap restaurant close by for coffee and rolls, or perhaps something more substantial, according to the state of their finances.

"Say, fellers," said Tatters, as they started for the hash-house, "I guess dat bill I got last night will pay fer grub all 'round dis mornin'."

"How much is it—a dollar?" asked Butts.

"Dat's about wot it is," said Tatters, as he pulled it out of his pocket and smoothed it out. "Hully gee!" he exclaimed, stopping in the middle of the street. "If it ain't a fiver!"

The crowd gathered around and looked at it.

"So 'tis," said Bermudas. "Tatters, youse ought'r blow us off ter Delmonico."

"I'm t'inkin' dat would be too rich fer yer blood. Portuguese Joe is good enough for us. Youse kin all have hash browned in de pan in addition to de reg'lar coffee an' rolls, an' it won't cost youse a cent."

"Yer a brick, Tatters," shouted the hungry urchins, making a wild break for the small eating-house kept by Portuguese Joe, as he was called.

When they had satisfied their appetite, Tatters led the procession up to the counter where Joe himself sat.

He threw down a handful of checks.

"Dis is, on me," he said, diving into his rags for the bill.

Portuguese Joe grinned.

He knew Tatters well, and had a friendly feeling for him, but it did not go as far as free grub when the boy was broke.

When the boy laid the bill on the counter he took it up and looked at it.

"Where you find dat, Tatters?" he asked, suspiciously.

"Don't youse worry erbout dat, Portugee. I've just been collectin' me rent. Hand over de change."

"You rich to-day," said the Portuguese, as he handed the boy what was coming to him.

"Betcher life I am, cull. Dis is me flush time. If it wasn't ag'in me temp'rance principles I'd take yer around de corner an' blow yer off."

Portuguese Joe grinned, the boys filed outside, and, after chinning a moment or two, scattered to their various stamping grounds.

Tatters, Butts and Bermudas went off up South Street together and finally sat down on a stringpiece of one of the wharves, in the sunshine.

It was rather early yet for business.

"Dat wuz a nice little gal last night dat youse had under yer wing, Tatters," grinned Butts. "She seemed to take'r great shine ter yer."

"Quit yer kiddin', Butts," retorted Tatters.

"I leave it ter Bermudas."

"Dat's right, Tatters. She wuz mashed on yer," said the other.

"Bermudas, yer make me tired."

"Youse have got de gent's keerd in yer clothes," said Butts. "He promised to get yer a new soot. If I wuz youse I'd take him up."

"Wot's de matter wit' yer? Do yer t'ink I want ter turn dood?"

"Yer don't have ter wear 'em if yer don't want ter. Yer kin soak 'em up in Cherry Hill for a couple of cases an' den lose de ticket, see?"

"Arter de gent had paid a tener for 'em mebbe, eh? Wot do yer take me for? I don't do dat kind of biz. If I took de clothes I'd wear 'em. But I don't want 'em. Dis outfit is good enough for me. I don't need no valley ter keep it in repair. I kin sleep in 'em an' work in 'em an' dey alwuz looks de same. Me name is Tatters, ain't it? Well, I'd look fine wit' dat name in a new soot, wouldn't I?"

"Dat's right," agreed his friends, together. "Yer wouldn't be Tatters no more."

"Of course I wouldn't. Den who would I be?"

"Give it up," replied Butts, scratching his head as if the problem was too much for him.

"Yer'd have ter get a new name," suggested Bermudas, sagely.

"Tatters is good enough for me," replied the lad, drumming with his bare heels upon the stringpiece.

"It's funny dat yer don't remember not'in' about yerself, Tatters," said Butts, reflectively. "Yer must er had a father an' mudder, like meself and Bermudas. I kin remember me old woman well. I lived wid her on a top floor, back, in Cherry Hill. She drank like er fish, an' used to beat de stuffin' out er me when she wuz full. She wuz pulled in reg'larly an' sent to de Island. De las' time she went up she never cum back. Dat wuz more'n a year ago. Somebody told me dat she died of de horrors an' was planted in Potter's Field, wherever dat is."

"My old woman used to drink some, too," said Bermudas, "but not as bad as dat. She wuz a cleaner in one of dem big buildin's on Broad Street. She fell down de stairs one night an' de ambulance took her off to de hospital. She wuz dere t'ree mont's. Den she wuz took bad an' died, an' I never seen her no more. Me old man is dead, too. He worked erlong de docks, an' was mashed up in de hold of

some vessel. A big case fell on him. So yer don't know not'in' erbout yer old man or old woman, do yer Tatters? Wuz yer picked up in de streets?"

"Dunno, Bermudas," answered Tatters, carelessly.

"Wot is de fust t'ing dat yer remember?" asked Butts, curiously.

"Der fust t'ing dat I remember wuz Caleb Tartar."

"Is dat er fact?"

"Yep. I wuz livin' wid him in Cherry Street. Dat's when he kept er junk store, an' he made me go 'round pickin' up old rags and udder t'ings outer de street an' back yards. He used ter lick me till I got tired er dat, an' I took er club ter him one night. Den he quit. An' I quit workin' for him, too. I didn't see him ag'in till youse fellers brought me down ter his lodgin' house one night."

"I remember dat night. De old stuff know'd yer ter oncet. Wanted yer ter cum back an' live wid him ag'in, an' 'cause yer wouldn't he's been sore on yer ever since," said Butts, with a grin.

"Dat's right," admitted Tatters.

"Didn't it ever strike yer dat Caleb might know some't'in' erbout yer old man an' old woman?" asked Bermudas, shying an oyster shell at a stray dog.

"Never t'ought not'in' erbout it," replied Tatters, as if that important matter gave him very little concern.

"Don't yer keer ter know?"

"Nope."

"Butts an' me wuz talkin' erbout yer de odder day. Butts said dat yer seemed ter be diff'rent from de rest of de kids dat we know. Yer don't cuss, nor smoke, nor chew, an' yer too blamed honest for anyt'in'. It ain't nat'ral. Yer mudder an' farder must have been diff'rent from de reg'lar run. Yer ain't never been ter school much dat I know of yet yer kin read de noosepaper like er book."

"An inspector made Caleb send me ter school. He didn't want ter, but he wuz skeered to keep me out. I s'pose I'd er been goin' yet if I hadn't run away from him dat time."

"How did yer like it?"

"De teacher wuz good ter me an' I did de best I could while I wuz wid her. I learned ter spell an' read, an' do sums, an' write down t'ings from de blackboard."

"Did she call youse Tatters?"

"Nope. She called me Johnny."

"Here, you kids, skidoo! Skip! And be quick about it!" cried a rough-voiced dockmaster at this moment.

The three boys rose like a covey of frightened quails, darted across the way and up the nearest street, with their bootblack outfits swinging from their shoulders.

CHAPTER IV.

HOW TATTERS CLEVERLY OUTWITS A THIEF.

"Say, Bermudas," said Tatters, casting his eye down in the street, "what's dat feller up ter?"

"Wot feller?" asked Bermudas, following the direction of his friend's extended forefinger.

"Dat tough-lookin' snoozer behind de gent wid de grip."

It was about eleven o'clock, and Tatters and Bermudas had mounted a tall pile of bricks in front of an unfinished building on Front Street to indulge in a quiet game of craps.

They were busily engaged with the dice when Tatters, happening to look up, with a wary eye for a policeman, noticed the suspicious behavior of the fellow who was following close behind a well-dressed man with an alligator bag in his right hand.

"Bet a nickel he's goin' ter swipe de bag if he kin," replied Bermudas.

The words were hardly out of his mouth before the shifty-looking individual made a snatch at the grip, wrenched it from the owner's hand and ran across the street as fast as his legs could carry him.

"Stop thief!" shouted the stranger, following him.

The rascal darted around the brick pile, with the evident intention of hiding inside of the unfinished buildings.

"No, yer don't cull!" cried Tatters, springing from his perch and landing on the fellow's back.

The shock was too much for the thief, who lost his balance and pitched forward on his hands and knees.

He tried to get up, but Tatters' weight on his back held him down until the man who owned the bag came up, grabbed the rascal by the arm and held him securely so that it was impossible for him to bolt.

Tatters then dismounted, with a grin.

"I'm much obliged to you, my lad," said the stranger, with a smile. "That was about as clever a thing as I ever saw done."

"Dat wuz de only way I could reach him, mister. I seen him copper yer grip an' try ter get away wid it, so I t'ought I'd queer de game."

"You did me a great service, my boy, and you shan't lose anything by it. That bag is full of valuable papers and securities, and its loss would have seriously embarrassed me. What is your name?"

"Me name is Tatters."

"What's that? Tatters?"

"Yep."

"Are you the boy who helped a gentleman and a little girl to escape from a gang of thieves on Water Street last night?"

"You've got it straight, mister."

"That was my brother and little niece you befriended, and here you've done me a special service, too. I must certainly become better acquainted with you."

"Here comes a cop down de street!" shouted Bermudas, from the top of the brick pile.

The shifty individual struggled hard to get loose, and tried to strike his captor, but Tatters grabbed his arm and prevented him.

A crowd gathered about the three principals in this affair, and when the officer came up he had to force his way

through to reach the spot where the stranger and Tatters held the thief.

"Here, officer," said the man who owned the grip, "I want you to arrest this rascal. He snatched my bag, and would have got away with it only for this boy, who cut off his escape. Had I lost the bag I should have suffered a serious inconvenience and probably considerable loss."

"I'll take him to the station, and you and the boy must come along. I know this fellow. He's just finished six months on the Island. I guess this will give him a trip up the river. He deserves it."

He yanked the thief along with very little ceremony, the stranger and Tatters by his side and the crowd, which included Bermudas, of course, followed behind.

The procession wended its way to the Old Slip police station, and the rascal was hustled up to the desk, where the charge was made to the sergeant.

He entered the facts in the blotter.

The thief refused to answer any questions, and was conducted to a cell.

"What is your name, sir?" asked the sergeant of the stranger.

"John Warburton."

"What's yours, boy?"

"Tatters."

The sergeant frowned.

He thought the lad was making a funny break.

"I asked you what your name was," he said, severely.

"I told you me name is Tatters. Dat's all de name I've got."

"Are you telling the truth, boy?" asked the officer, incredulously.

"I never told a lie in me life," replied Tatters, with a proud flash of the eye.

"Haven't you got a father or mother?"

"Nope. Never had any."

"Where do you live?"

"Nowheres in partic'lar. I sleep at Caleb Tartar's lodgings when I've de price, which I gen'rally has."

"Where is this Caleb Tartar's lodgings?"

"On Water Street, near——" and Tatters mentioned the name of another street.

"I guess I'll have to hold you as a witness in this case, young fellow."

But naturally Tatters had a strong objection to being detained at the station, with the chances of being sent to the House of Detention for witnesses for an indefinite period after the examination that afternoon at the Tombs, so he put up a big kick.

But it wouldn't have done him any good, for the sergeant had decided to hold him, when Mr. Warburton came to his rescue.

"I'll be responsible for his appearance at the Tombs this afternoon, sergeant," he said.

"How can you?" asked the officer, curtly. "He'll probably give you the slip the moment you're outside the sta-

tion. He's got no home, by his own statement. I've half a mind to hold him as a vagrant."

"I ain't no vagrant," said Tatters. "I pay as I go. Dere's me money, see?"

He held up the bills and change he had received from Portuguese Joe out of the fiver.

"Let him go, officer, and I promise you that I won't lose sight of him. I'll have him at the Tombs at two o'clock."

The sergeant yielded with very bad grace.

"See that you do, sir," he replied, sharply. "He's your only witness."

"Don't yer fool yerself, boss. Dere's anudder one—me friend, Bermudas. He'll be at de Tombs wid me ter help de t'ing along."

"Take him along with you," said the sergeant to Mr. Warburton.

"Can I have my bag?"

"No, sir. That must go to the court."

"But there are papers in it that I require."

"Can't help it. You'll have to see the judge about it."

Mr. Warburton was very much disappointed, but he couldn't help himself, so he had to leave the station without the bag, and with him went Tatters.

Outside they met Bermudas.

"Dis is me friend, Bermudas, mister," said Tatters, introducing his companion. "He saw dat tough take yer bag, too."

"Is that the only name you have also?" asked Mr. Warburton, with a smile.

"Nope. Dat's me nick-name. Me right name is Hen. Smith."

"You seem to be luckier in that respect than Tatters here. He says he hasn't any other name."

"Dat's right. He hasn't."

"Well, I'm going to take Tatters off with me, if he doesn't object. I hope to meet you outside of the Tombs at two o'clock sharp, Smith."

"I'll be dere, betcher life!"

"Take keer of me box, Bermudas," said Tatters, as he and his new acquaintance started off up the street.

"I'll carry it wit' me till I meet yer ag'in. So long, Tatters."

CHAPTER V.

WHAT HAPPENED TO TATTERS.

"So your name is Tatters?" said John Warburton, looking down at the ragged lad, with an expression of much interest on his face.

"Yep."

"And you really haven't any other name at all?"

"Nope."

"And you live nowhere in particular?"

"Dat's right."

"And these are the best clothes you own?"

"Dis is me Sunday soot an' me every-day rags, too," grinned Tatters.

"You look like a bright boy."

"I've cut me eye-teeth, betcher life."

"Do you earn your living shining shoes?"

"Dat's wot I do, mister."

"You look like an honest boy."

"I never stole not'in' in me life. It's ag'in me principles."

"Tatters, I'd like to do something for you. In fact, my brother has already made up his mind to do something in that line if you'll let him."

"I don't want not'in' from nobody. I kin make me own way."

"I see you are independent, Tatters, and self-reliant. The principle does you credit. But you're heavily handicapped by the life you are leading. You are a boy of the streets, and the influences surrounding you are dangerous and work against you. You've acquired an unnatural sharpness and shrewdness from your manner of life. If properly directed this will hereafter be of great advantage to you. I want you to understand, Tatters, that I am talking to you for your own interest."

"I ain't kickin', mister."

"Now, wouldn't you like a good home, good clothes, an education, and a name that would be more suitable than Tatters?"

"Say, mister, you're joshin' me, ain't yer?"

"I suppose you mean, am I making game of you? No, Tatters, I'm not. My brother is anxious to take you away from the slums, and start you on a new life."

"Wot for?" in some astonishment.

"Because he's taken an interest in you."

"Nobody never took no interest in me except Caleb Tarter, an' he wanted me ter work for him for not'in'."

"My brother is grateful to you because you saved him and his little girl from a great danger last night. I may say, Ruth has taken a great fancy to you."

"Ruth! Wot yer mean?"

"That's the little girl's name."

"Dat little girl I stood by last night?" growing interested all at once.

"Yes," replied Mr. Warburton, noting the change in the boy's manner. "She told me this morning that you are a brave boy. That you wouldn't let those ruffians come near her. She likes you very much, and wants to see you again."

"Wants ter see me? Yer don't mean dat, I guess," said Tatters, almost wistfully.

"I do mean it. And I'm going to take you up to see her now."

"Mister, I'm afraid dat I can't go."

"Why not?"

"Look at me clothes," and for the first time in his life Tatters cast a dissatisfied glance at his rags and his bare feet.

"I'm going to treat you to a new outfit, from a hat to shoes and stockings."

"I couldn't make me livin' in a new soot. I'd look like a dood, an' de fellers'd guy de life out er me."

"But you mustn't go back to the slums again. My brother intends to give you a place in his office."

"But I can't do not'n' but shine shoes, mister," protested Tatters.

"You know the city well, I guess, and can run errands, and make yourself generally useful."

"I kin do dat all right."

"You're to live at my brother's house, go to night school, and be company for Ruth."

"De little girl!" ejaculated Tatters, with some excitement.

"Yes. I'm sure you'll enjoy her society very much. She's the nicest little girl in the world."

"Betcher life she is!" cried Tatters, enthusiastically.

"You'll see her every day, eat at the table with her, and on Sundays you can go out walking with her in Central Park and elsewhere."

"Say, mister," said Tatters, looking earnestly at Mr. Warburton, "is dis here a fairy tale yer givin' me?"

"A fairy tale! What do you mean?"

"Youse is stuffin' me, ain't yer, erbout me seein' dat girl every day, an' eatin' wid her, an' walkin' out inter de park, an' all dat?"

"Certainly not, Tatters. I'm telling you what's before you."

"I don't seem ter understand it," replied Tatters, evidently much perplexed. "Dat little girl is too good for me. I ain't in her class, mister."

They had reached the neighborhood of East Broadway, and were about to cross that thoroughfare when a sudden hubbub arose around them.

The horses attached to a big brewery wagon which had been standing in Chatham Square had become frightened by a tooting automobile and had started up East Broadway on the run.

As they reached the first side street they collided with an express wagon just turning the corner at a smart pace.

The result was a big smash-up.

A large crowd collected around the ruins of the two teams in a very few moments, and Mr. Warburton and Tatters were caught in the thick of it.

There was so much excitement and pushing and squeezing that Tatters got separated from his new friend and quite lost sight of him in the mob.

As soon as Mr. Warburton missed him from his side he began to look for him.

But Tatters was a small object to distinguish in that assemblage.

There were two persons, however, who were more fortunate in keeping track of the boy.

These men, smooth-faced and hard-looking had been following Mr. Warburton and Tatters from the moment they left Old Slip police station.

They were friends and pals of the man who had been arrested for trying to steal Mr. Warburton's grip, and had been eye-witnesses of the whole affair, from the very moment their associate had grabbed the bag.

These two fellows, as well as the prisoner himself, were members of the Water Street gang, and, as a matter of fact, were the very three who had first attacked Edward Warburton and his little daughter the night before.

They were close behind Mr. John Warburton and Tatters when the accident happened, and they took immediate advantage of the rapidly gathering crowd to push in and separate the boy from his new friend.

Then they jostled him about and forced him further and further away from Mr. Warburton, and finally pushed him out to the fringe of the mob.

Then they grabbed him roughly by the arms and hustled him along the side street.

"Say, what's de matter wid youse fellers?" demanded Tatters, putting up a game struggle to free himself.

Shut up and step lively!" cried one of the fellows, in a menacing tone.

"Let me go, will yer!" cried the boy, angrily. "What do yer take me for, anyway?"

"Be quiet or I'll choke the life out of you, you little imp!" threatened the other man, grabbing Tatters by the neck and giving his windpipe a squeeze that made him gasp for breath.

But Tatters was a spunky youngster, if he was only thirteen, and the way he kicked and fought for freedom gave his captors all they could do to hold him.

As all this occurred in broad daylight in the middle of the day, it was bound to attract some notice.

But the men didn't seem to care for that.

They kept on yanking the boy along, and though many people remarked the affair, no one seemed disposed to interfere, or even ask what the trouble was about.

Finally they hauled Tatters into a saloon two blocks from Chatham Square, and rushed him into a back room.

Here one of the men choked the boy till he was half insensible, while the other went to the bar and got a glass of water.

He brought it into the back room, took a bottle out of his pocket and poured some of its contents into the glass, stirred it up and then forced it down the boy's throat.

Five minutes later Tatters was, so to speak, dead to the world.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RENDEZVOUS OF THE NIGHT OWLS.

When Tatters recovered his senses he was astonished to find himself in a place quite unfamiliar to his eyes.

He lay on a pile of gunny sacks, his arms bound behind his back, and his head resting on the heel of a wooden rib of what appeared to be a long and narrow vessel.

The lopsided aspect of the strange craft, and the absence of buoyancy and motion, indicated that it was aground somewhere.

The faint glimmering of a light coming from behind him, which threw weird reflections about the gloomy spot where he lay, and the uproar made by a dozen voices engaged in noisy conversation and laughter, attracted the boy's attention at once, and he rolled over to see what was going on about him.

A dozen or more feet away from him was a crowd of hard-looking boys, from fourteen to eighteen years of age, squatting about a hatch-cover, playing cards.

A lighted candle stuck into the neck of an empty beer bottle furnished the only illumination and gave Tatters the impression that it was night.

"Where de dickens am I?" he asked himself, as his bright eyes roamed about the place. "It's de hold of a canal boat, sure's yer live. Some old one dat's lyin' out'r de water, by de looks of it. An' who are dem toughs around dat hatch? I never seen dem afore. Wot has happened ter me, anyway, or am I dreamin' dis t'ing?"

Tatters soon began to recall the incidents of the morning—the capture of the thief; the scene at the Old Slip station; the subsequent walk as far as East Broadway with Mr. Warburton, whose name he did not remember, and finally the rough handling he had received from the two members of the Water Street gang.

"Wot did dey do to me? Dey must have hoccussed me in dat saloon and den carried me here. Now wot's dere object? Wot have I done to 'em dat dey're tryin' ter get back at me in dis way? Dat's wot I want ter know."

The crowd around the table grew more noisy, more hilarious, and finally quarrelsome as the moments passed.

Oaths flew about thick and fast, occasional blows were exchanged, and the chances of a general scrap seemed to be good.

"I never seen such a tough gang in me life," muttered Tatters. "I don't like de looks of dem for a cent. Here I am tied up like a chicken. I wonder wot dey mean ter do wit' me?"

The gang, however, paid no attention whatever to Tatters.

As time passed there were desertions from, and accessions to, the bunch around the table.

The stakes played for were not large, but there was just as much excitement over results as if the risks were big.

Tatters watched the proceedings until he grew tired of it all, then he began to consider his own disagreeable situation more earnestly.

His first object was to try and loosen his bonds if he could.

He worked his tough little wrists about and strained at the rope until he succeeded in loosening it enough to enable him to draw out one of his hands, which, if brown and calloused, were small and well formed.

Of course, the other hand followed easily enough and he was free.

"Dat's a satisfaction, at any rate," he said to himself. "Now if I kin get half a chance I'll fly de coop."

Several of the younger members of the card-playing crowd reeled off to one side, stretched themselves out in uncouth attitudes and went off in a drunken sleep.

"If dey'd all only do dat it would soot me to de queen's taste," thought Tatters.

Just then a couple of the biggest card players got into a muss over some disputed point.

The game was temporarily suspended while the rest watched the scrap and encouraged the fighters to put it all over each other.

Very little science was displayed by the fighters.

They slugged away at each other and frequently clinched, staggering about on the uneven surface of the hold.

At the height of the fight a man suddenly dropped down through the open hatchway and, seizing the scrappers, separated them.

"Get on deck, all of yer, d'ye hear?" he shouted, angrily. "Yer make noise enough down here to rouse a churchyard. Didn't I tell yer to keep shady while this business of ours is under way? First thing you know this coop of yours will be spotted by the Jersey cops, and then yer'll all be sent to Snake Hill."

He chased the boys up the hatchway, and Tatters heard another man's voice above, talking to them on deck.

"Come on, Spratts!" cried the man who had entered the hold. "Drop the kid down and we'll stow him alongside the other chap."

Tatters saw something like the form of a boy let down through the hatchway, and caught by the fellow below.

Then the man Spratts jumped down himself, and the two dragged their burden close to the spot where Tatters lay.

"Get the candle, Hague," said Spratts, "and let's see if this Tatters chap has come to yet."

Tatters thought it advisable to put his hands behind his back again, so that the fellows wouldn't discover that he had freed himself from his bonds, and as Hague drew near with the light he closed his eyes and simulated unconsciousness.

The candle was held close to his face, and the rascals listened to his breathing.

"He's safe enough for an hour or two yet," remarked Hague. "I gave him a strong dose of the drops. He's been unconscious about ten hours."

"Probably he won't wake up till mornin'," said Spratts.

"So much the better. As we've got to keep him and that Bermudas here until Bill gets off, we'll have to rig up some kind of partition down here to fence them off from the rest of the hold."

"We can do that, I guess," said Spratts.

"There's an old shanty over yonder on the edge of the marsh. We'll get the Owls to pull it to pieces, and use the wood to build the partition with."

"We'll do it in the mornin', then we'll have these kids dead to rights. There was a cop lookin' for this Tatters this afternoon along Water Street."

"The judge must have issued an order for him when he didn't show up at the examination. Now that we've got Bermudas, the other witness, in our hands I'm thinkin' that gent will have a hard job makin' a case against Bill, eh?"

"You bet."

Tatters's sharp ears took in every word the two men said, and he now clearly understood why he had been abducted to this out-of-the-way place, which he judged to be somewhere in the Jersey marshes, not far from the bay.

And his friend Bermudas, it appeared, had also been caught and brought over there, too.

Well, if he and Bermudas couldn't show these rascals a trick or two before many hours had passed over their heads it wouldn't be for the want of trying.

"Are you down there, Hague?" roared a voice at that moment from the combings of the open hatchway.

"There's Skillings now," said Hague, who immediately replied to the hail, inviting the newcomer to come down.

The shadowy figure of a big, burly man dropped into the hold and advanced to the place where Hague and Spratts stood.

"Benson and me have brought the girl over," was the first thing Skillings said.

"Yer don't mean to say yer've got her already?"

"I do mean to say it. She's in the boat with Benson, alongside."

"Yer've been mighty slick workin' the trick, seein' how yer failed last night with everythin' in yer favor."

"It was that imp Tatters who queered us. I'd like to choke him for it!" said the man, savagely.

Tatters heard the threat plainly enough, and it didn't make him feel any too good, for he was in the power of these men, and he had already had a sample of their way of dealing with him.

"Yer kin choke him if yer want to, Skillings, for we've got him over here, but it isn't worth while, now yer say yer've got the girl."

Skillings muttered something under his breath, then he said, aloud:

"Where are we goin' to keep the girl till we can put the deal through?"

"In the cabin, aft. It's just the place for her. She couldn't get out of it to save her life, even if there wasn't nobody on board to watch her. This boat is the finest hiding place that I know of. It's anchored on a mud-bank right in the marsh, and the grass is so tall and thick hereabouts that yer can't see her ten feet away in any direction."

"I know that," replied Skillings. "Benson and me had to work the boat through the stuff all the way from the bay, and we ran aground about forty times gettin' here."

"Yer may know how safe it is when I tell yer the Night Owls have been using this boat for more'n a year and the police haven't been able to spot 'em," said Hague.

"I'm satisfied. Benson and me look to you and Spratts to see that the girl is kept out of sight and is well treated, while we work the scheme in the city. We shall hold out

for \$10,000. Benson and me get \$6,000, and you two the balance. We got \$5,000 out of that Ohio job we put through a couple of years ago. We ought to have got more, but there were so many detectives on the case that we concluded to reduce the ante. We had the boy's father frightened out of his boots. That's how we got the money. The police objected to the settlement, but it was, of course, made without their knowledge. This affair ought to be easy alongside of that."

"I hope it will. Let's go on deck and take the girl aboard."

With that the three men left the hold, Hague leaving the candle on the hatch.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ESCAPE.

"I'm glad dey got out'r here," said Tatters, drawing a breath of relief. "I didn't know but dat big chap Skilings might take it inter his head ter choke me windpipe. He looks bad enough ter do most anyt'in'. So dey've run off wid dat little girl, have dey?" clinching his fists. "An' dey mean ter keep her here a pris'ner till dey get \$10,000. An' dey expect ter keep me an' Bermudas here till dey get dere friend Bill, the feller dat swiped de grip, out'r de Tombs. P'raps dey will, an' den ag'in p'raps dey won't. But when we get ready ter skin out, der little girl goes wid us, or we'll know de reason why she don't."

A movement upon the gunny sacks at his feet called his attention in that direction.

"I guess Bermudas is comin' ter his senses," he muttered, getting up and crawling toward his companion in misfortune. "Hello, Bermudas!"

"Who's dat?"

"Tatters."

"Tatters! Why, where am I? And say, who's been tyin' me hands behind me back?"

"Two fellers called Hague an' Spratts. Dey belong to de Water Street gang. Dey didn't do a t'ing to me, eider."

"What did dey do to yer? And do yer know where we are?" asked Bermudas. "I dunno how I got here. De las t'ing I remember wuz dat a couple of fellers jumped on me in Front Street after dark, an' one of dem hit me wit' er club. I t'ought me head wuz busted, an' den anudder clip knocked de daylights out'r me."

"Dem chaps caught me up in East Broadway erbout noon," explained Tatters. "I wuz walkin' erlong wit' de gent I interdooced yer to outside de station-house. Two wagons run inter one another an' I lost de gent in de crowd. Den dose Water Street chaps caught hold'r me, run me inter a saloon, half choked me windpipe an' poured some stuff down me t'roat dat done me up. I didn't know not'in' more till I woke up here a little while'r go. Dere wuz a lot of kids down here, den, playin' keards."

Dose two chaps come down an' drove 'em out an' took a look at me ter see if I had come ter me senses. But I made out dat I hadn't. Dey t'ink I'm good till mornin', see? Dey're goin' ter build a coop ter put us in down here, Bermudas, so de best t'ing we kin do is ter sneak while de coast is clear."

"De best t'ing youse kin do is ter get me hands loose, den I'll talk bizness," replied Bermudas.

"I'll do dat, betcher life!"

Tatters, however, found that his friend had been tied even tighter than himself, and that he couldn't get the knots loose.

"I haven't got no knife, Bermudas, but if you'll keep quiet I'll get de candle an' burn de rope."

Tatters didn't lose a moment, for he couldn't tell when their enemies might take it into their heads to return to the hold.

The candle flame soon released Bermudas from his fetters, though it scorched his flesh a bit during the operation.

However, a little thing like that didn't bother him.

"Now, Bermudas, let's see how t'ings look outside," said Tatters. "I want'r tell yer one t'ing, dough. Dat little girl we saved wit' her father last night has been kidnapped, an' is aboard dis old canal boat. Dey've got her in de cabin by dis time, an' it's up ter us ter get her away wit' us."

"Is dat'r fact, Tatters?" exclaimed Bermudas, apparently astonished.

"Yep. Sure t'ing. Yer goin' ter stand by me in dis, ain't yer, Bermudas?"

"Say, Tatters, don't I alwuz stand by yer?"

"Dat's right. Yer do. We've got our hands full dis time, betcher life, but it's a cold day when me an' youse get left."

"Well, I guess!" grinned Bermudas.

By this time they were standing beneath the open hatch.

"Give me a boost, Bermudas," said Tatters.

His companion hoisted him up till he pulled his chin to a level with the combings.

Then, steadying himself by resting his bare feet on Bermudas's shoulders he looked cautiously up and down the deck of the canal boat.

The night was as black as ink, and a cool breeze soughed through the marsh grass which surrounded the boat on all sides.

"I don't see not'in'," he whispered down to his companion. "It's so dark dat I guess it's safe ter get up."

He scrambled on deck.

"Now give mie yer hand, Bermudas, an' I'll give yer a lift."

With Tatters's assistance, Bermudas got out of the hold.

"Dere's a boat somewhere alongside," said Tatters, "dat de fellers brought de girl in from de city, an' dere must be anudder one in which youse came over in. Now dis canalboat is on a mud bank, so we'll have ter find where de water is before we kin find de boats. Look out dat yer don't run inter dem Night Owls if dey're aboard."

Fortunately for them, the Night Owls had all gone off

to the old shanty in the marsh to continue their gambling where they would not be disturbed.

The two boys found that the stern of the canalboat projected into the water, and here they found the boats.

But the greatest danger faced them at this point because the cabin was here, and through the door, which stood slightly ajar, they saw the four ruffians of the Water Street gang smoking and drinking inside, while lying upon one of the bunks was the unconscious form of Ruth Warburton.

Benson and Skillings, the kidnappers, presently got up and said it was time that they returned to the city.

Tatters and Bermudas at once hid behind the cabin, and from this shelter they saw the two rascals take their departure.

Hague and Spratts sat down on the stern rail and finished their smoke.

"We must lay in a better stock of grub and whiskey than we brought over with us," remarked Spratts.

"Don't yer worry about that. The boys'll get us all we want from the main shore. I've promised them twenty-five cases apiece when this job has been put through, and they'll see that we want for nothin' we kin pay for."

"How are you going to secure that cabin door?" asked Spratts. "I don't see any lock on it."

"We'll get a stout hasp and padlock to-morrow. For to-night we'll brace a stick against it. I'll show yer."

Hague entered the cabin, blew out the candle and returned with a stout bit of wood, one end of which he placed against the stern rail and the other against the center of the cabin door.

"There you are. The gal is as safe as though she was bolted in."

Spratts agreed that she was.

"Let's take a look at them two boys again," said Hague, "and then one of us can turn in, while the other stands watch."

Their conversation had easily been overheard by Tatters and Bermudas from where they stood, and as the men moved forward toward the hatchway along one side of the cabin, the boys moved in the opposite direction, or toward the spot just vacated by the rascals, along the other side.

"We must fly de coop now in a hurry an' take de gal," said Tatters, "for dose fellers will find us missin' from the hold in erbout two minutes. It's a good t'ing de cabin door ain't locked or I dunno wot we'd do erbout gettin' de girl out. Now, Bermudas, youse wants ter drop inter de boat, an' I'll hand de girl down ter yer, see?"

Bermudas understood, and he slid down into the boat while Tatters removed the wooden brace which held the door, entered the cabin, and, lifting the unconscious little girl in his arms, carried her outside and handed her down to his companion.

"De oars are in de boat, ain't dey, Bermudas?" he asked, anxiously.

"Sure t'ing," was the reply.

Tatters shut the door and replaced the brace as it was before.

Then his sharp ears heard the excited voice of Hague and Spratts, as they were clambering out of the hold.

It was clear they had discovered the escape of their prisoners, and they were wild with fury.

Tatters cast off the boat's painter, and swung down into her from the rail.

"Push off, Bermudas!" he cried, in a low tone. "Dose fellers are lookin' fer us now, an' it won't do for dem to find out which way we've gone."

CHAPTER VIII.

LOST IN THE MARSH.

Bermudas, placing his oar against the stern-post of the canalboat, pushed the boat away into the tall grass.

Such a thing as rowing was entirely out of the question.

Tatters and his companion used the oars as poles to push the little craft along.

The water was not deep at the best, and they were continually running onto shallow spots, where the boat wobbled so that they expected at any moment to be dumped out into the mud.

"Dis is de wurst ever, Bermudas," said Tatters, after they had gone a little way, and had grounded half a dozen times.

"Dat's wot it is, Tatters. I don't mind takin' er bath wit' me clothes off in real water, but ter tumble inter dis stuff wit' me rags on ain't wot I keer for."

"Will youse listen to dem fellers swearin' back dere on de deck," said Tatters. "I guess dey've found out dat we've run off wid de boat."

"Wot diff'rence does it make wot dey t'ink. Dey hain't got no boat ter chase us wit'."

"Dat's right, dey hain't."

Fearful of upsetting their little craft, especially on the little girl's account, the boys made a slow and cautious advance through the grass of the marsh.

"I hope dat we're goin' in de right direction," said Bermudas, at last.

"Dunno," replied Tatters. "It's so dark, an' de grass is so t'ick dat a feller can't tell where he is."

At that moment Ruth Warburton began to stir, where Bermudas had placed her in the bottom of the boat.

"De girl is comin' ter her senses," said Bermudas. "Do yer know her name?"

"Her name is Ruth," answered Tatters.

"Ruth wot?"

"Dunno her udder name. We kin ask her when she comes ter herself."

"I wish de moon wuz out, den we could tell how we wuz headin'," said Bermudas, after another ten-minute inter-

val, during which the boat made its way through the grass and water with great difficulty.

"It seems ter me dat we ought'r strike de bay pretty soon," said Tatters. "Dat canalboat couldn't 'r got very far up in dis kind of place."

Tatters was quite right in his idea—the canalboat was not very far from the bay, but it hadn't come by the way they were going.

It had been blown up a kind of grass-covered creek and lodged on the first mud-bank it struck.

Had the boys been acquainted with the marsh, or struck the creek, which ran within a few yards of the stern of the canalboat, they would soon have reached open water.

As it was, the boat was simply being propelled deeper and deeper into the maze of swampland, and in their efforts to avoid being upset, were actually working around in a circle.

The night being intensely dark, they had no means of knowing how they were going.

They were simply trusting to luck, and luck was playing them a shabby trick.

A cry from Ruth Warburton at length arrested their attention and their exertions.

She sat up in the boat and gazed wildly at the boys and at the surroundings.

The darkness and strangeness of her situation terrified her.

She thought she was experiencing a terrible dream, for her last recollections were of home and a big, cosy arm-chair in which she was sitting, and in which she had gone to sleep, waiting for her father and mother to return from a visit to a neighbor's, a couple of blocks away.

While she slept, Benson and Skillings had entered the house, chloroformed and carried her off in a cab, which had driven direct to the Staten Island ferry, boarded a boat, and, on its arrival at St. George, had carried the abductors and their little victim to a certain wharf, where a boat was in waiting.

In this boat the rascals had made their way to the stranded canalboat in the New Jersey marsh.

But of all this Ruth was ignorant.

She began to sob in a pitiful manner, not understanding what it all meant, when Tatters took upon himself the role of comforter.

"Don't cry, Ruth. Yer safe wit' us. I'm Tatters. Don't yer recollect me?"

Tatters!

She had been thinking of him before she dropped off to sleep in the chair.

Wondering when she should see him again, and now, though she couldn't distinguish his features in the gloom, she knew his voice, and her astonishment for the moment overcame her fear.

"Tatters!" she tremulously said. "Are you really Tatters?"

"Sure t'ing. I'm de kid dat stood by youse last night down by der ferry."

"I can't see you, Tatters, but your voice——" she began, in nervous tones.

"Here's a match, Tatters," interposed Bermudas at this point. "Strike er glim an' let de little girl see youse."

"Dat's de ticket!" replied the ragged urchin, and in a moment the glare of the match, which Tatters shaded with his hands, lit up the boat and its occupants, and threw their shadows upon the thick grass around them.

"Oh, Tatters!" screamed Ruth. "What does this all mean? Am I dreaming?"

"No, Miss Ruth. It ain't no dream. Youse have been kidnapped from yer home by two fellers dat expected ter make yer father pay er lot er money ter get yer back. Dey must'r hocussed yer ter keep yer quiet, like dey done ter us. Dey brought yer erboard an old canalboat in dis marsh, which is somewhere in Jersey, an' meant ter keep yer dere till yer father put up der stuff. But me an' Bermudas got on ter dere game an' we've reskered yer, see? We're goin' ter take yer right back ter yer home if youse'll tell us where yer live."

"Oh, Tatters, I'm so frightened!" sobbed Ruth. "I can't understand it. I don't remember any men carrying me off!"

"Dat's 'cause yer must'r been asleep when dey got yer, an' dey gave yer somet'in' ter keep yer from wakin' up right erway."

"Am I in a boat, Tatters?"

"Dat's wot yer are, Ruth," he replied.

"And who is this boy with you?"

"Dis is me friend, Bermudas. He's all right. He'll stick by yer t'rough t'ick an' t'in, same as meself."

Ruth was silent for some moments, during which the boys resumed their work pushing the boat along through the grass and shallow water.

"Papa and mamma will be frightened to death about me," sobbed the girl.

"Youse'll be home soon, so don't yer worry," said Tatters, consolingly.

"How did you know my name was Ruth?"

"A gent wot I done a favor for ter-day told me. He said yer father wuz his bro'er."

"You met Uncle John!" cried Ruth, in surprise.

"I don't remember wot his name wuz, dough I heard him tell de sergeant at de station."

"His name is John Warburton. My name is Ruth Warburton. My father's name is Edward."

"T'anks. I'll try an' remember, but Ruth is easier."

"Call me Ruth, of course, and I'll call you Tatters, because you haven't any other name, have you?" she answered, shyly.

"No, miss. Tatters is all dat I have, an' it seems good enough for me. Wot do yer s'pose yer Uncle John wanted me ter do ter-day?"

"I don't know."

"He wuz goin' ter get me er new soot, an' a hat, an' shoes, an' stockin's, which I ain't used ter. Den he wuz goin' ter take me up ter yer home ter see youse."

"Oh, why didn't you come? I should have been so glad to have seen you," she cried, in a delighted tone.

"Would yer, really?"

"Yes, very much, indeed."

"Youse is too good for a kid like me, Ruth," answered Tatters, wistfully.

"You mustn't say that, Tatters. I like you, papa is anxious to do something for you, and mamma is eager to see you, and thank you for what you did for papa and I last night."

"Yer Uncle John said yer father wuz goin' ter give me a job in his office, an' dat I wuz ter live wit' yer at yer house, an' go walkin' wit' yer in de park. I t'ought dat wuz too good ter be real. Sounds like er fairy tale."

"Papa did tell mamma that he would like to take you away from the slums, and make a man of you. He said you were a rough diamond, and all that you needed was education and respectable surroundings. He wants to bring you up in his office, and he did say it would be a good idea for you to live with us, for I could teach you lots of things, and he thought you'd be willing to learn from me."

"He said all dat, did he?" said Tatters, much astonished at the interest that Ruth's father seemed to be taking in him.

"Every word."

"I don't see why he should keer for a kid like me."

"He's very grateful to you for what you did last night. But, oh, Tatters, you don't know how grateful he and mamma will be for what you're doing for me now—bringin' me back home after those dreadful men carried me off. You've got to stay with us now, Tatters. You will, won't you?"

"I dunno, miss. I should miss all me old friends. Here's Bermudas, and den dere's Butts, an' Billy Moss, an' Tommy Dodd, he's a cripple, an' has ter use a crutch. I'd feel awful lonesome—like er fish out'r water."

"Dat's right," put in Bermudas, who didn't relish the idea of parting from his friend Tatters.

"You could see them sometimes," said Ruth, encouragingly.

Tatters, however, made no reply.

He wasn't quite sure whether such a radical change in his condition would suit him.

While he was thinking about it, Bermudas suddenly said:

"We're a long time gettin' out'r dis, Tatters. I'm er t'inkin' we're lost in de swamp."

CHAPTER IX.

IN A TRAP.

"Oh, Tatters, are we really lost?" exclaimed Ruth, in dismay.

"Dunno, miss. But I t'ink we're kinder mixed up. We

ought'r been out on de bay by dis time. Yer see, dis grass is so t'ick, an' de night is so dark, an' we can't push ahead straight on ercount of dere not bein' ernough water, dat I s'pose we've kinder got out'r our course. Looks as if we won't be able ter get out till mornin', when we kin see where we are."

"Must we stay all night in this boat?"

"I don't see dat we kin do anyt'in' else, Ruth," replied Tatters.

"Dat's right," coincided Bermudas. "Dere's not'in' but mud, an' water, an' grass all erbout, see?"

The prospect looked decidedly gloomy to the three, especially to Ruth, who wasn't accustomed to roughing it.

If the girl, for whose safety they felt responsible, was not in their company, Tatters and Bermudas wouldn't have worried much over the outlook.

They would have probably curled up in the boat and gone to sleep.

"Dere ain't no use pushin' 'round dis way any more," said Bermudas, pulling in his oar. "We may be headin' away from de bay instead of toward it."

"Dat ain't no lie," answered Tatters, taking in his oar. "We've got'r wait till it gets light."

"Dere's an old coat here," said Bermudas, pulling it out from a covered space in the bow. "Miss Ruth can put it over her an' go to sleep, don't yer t'ink?"

"It'll keep yer from gettin' cold," said Tatters, offering the article to the girl.

She objected at first, but as she realized that the night air was chilly, and that she might catch a bad cold, she was finally persuaded to use it.

Ruth didn't talk any more, and so the boys chinned together on various topics only of interest to themselves, and while listening to them the girl closed her eyes and in a very short time was sleeping as calmly as if in her bed at home.

After awhile the boys got tired of conversing and soon dozed off on their seats, with their heads bent forward on their arms.

Thus the night slowly passed away and daylight came.

With the rising of the sun above the New Jersey landscape Tatters and Bermudas awoke, but Ruth still slept on.

The first thing Tatters did was to stand up on the seat and try to see where they were.

But Tatters wasn't very tall, while the surrounding grass was, so he didn't gain much by this manoeuver.

"Wot do yer see?" asked Bermudas, eagerly.

"Not'in' at all," replied his companion. "Dat is, not'in' but de grass. Dere's plenty of dat, betcher life!"

"Well, let's get er move on an' see if we can't run inter open water."

So they applied themselves once more to the oars, poling the boat through the grass, and for the next half hour they made some progress, though they couldn't tell where they were getting to.

The sun was now in sight, and a very slight breeze waved the top of the grass to and fro.

All at once they slipped through an opening in the grass and to their astonishment, and not a little to their alarm, the stern of the canalboat they had fled from rose up before them, a couple of yards away.

"Hully gee!" exclaimed Tatters.

"Oh, Moses!" cried Bermudas.

Tatters saw that the cabin door was open, so it was evident Hague and Spratts had discovered the loss of their girl prisoner.

There was not a sign of life about the canalboat.

It looked as lonesome and deserted as the day it had drifted up the creek and grounded on the mud-bank.

"We must get out'r here afore dose fellers pipe us off," said Bermudas.

"Dere don't seem ter be any sign of dem dat I kin see," said Tatters.

"Dey must be in de hold."

"Mebbe dey are. I tell yer wot I'm goin' ter do. I'm goin' ter get on top of dat cabin an' see if dere ain't some way ter get out'r dis marsh."

"It's risky," warned Bermudas.

"We've got'r get our bearin's somehow, and dat's the easiest way dat I see."

Tatters didn't wait for his companion to make any further objection, but shinned up the side of the canalboat, and thence to the roof of the cabin.

From this point of vantage he made out the break in the grass a little way to the left, which marked the position of the creek.

He saw they could reach it in five minutes.

He also caught a glimpse of the bay, glimmering in the early morning sunshine.

And further away the sloping shore of Staten Island.

Behind him he could make out trees, and the roofs of several scattering houses on the Jersey shore.

"I see me way all right now," he muttered, in a tone of satisfaction, as he descended to the deck.

He glanced into the cabin, and the sight of part of a loaf of bread and a hunk of cheese on the table made his mouth water, for he hadn't eaten a mouthful since the previous morning at Portuguese Joe's restaurant, when he treated the crowd.

As none of their enemies was in sight he entered the cabin and grabbed the bread and cheese.

Then he looked into a locker to see if there was anything more in the eating line about.

"Hully gee!" he exclaimed. "If there ain't a revolver here. Mebbe dat'll come in handy for us."

He saw that it was fully loaded, so he shoved it into his waistband.

He came out on deck, took a cautious look along the deserted deck and then tossed the bread and cheese to Bermudas, after breaking off a hunk of each and eating with great rapidity and relish.

Then he ran swiftly over to the open hatch, and putting his ear down to the combing listened for some sound that would indicate the presence of persons below.

Not a sound did he hear.

"Dey must'r all lit out," he thought.

He returned to the stern and reported the apparent state of things to Bermudas.

"Dere's a break in de grass dat way," he said, pointing toward the creek. "De bay is further on, an' Staten Island only a little way off. We kin get out'r here in no time."

"Dat's good," replied Bermudas. "Let's start ter oncet."

At that moment Ruth woke up and looked around her.

It was a moment or two before she realized where she was and what had happened to her during the night.

By that time Tatters was in the boat again and the boys were pushing their way toward the creek.

"I've got me bearin's, Ruth," said Tatters. "We'll have yer home in a couple of hours."

"I'm so glad," replied the girl, joyfully.

Tatters didn't say any more because his attention was fully occupied with the oar in one hand and a chunk of bread and cheese in the other.

A moment more they shot out into the open water of the creek.

But here an unpleasant surprise awaited them.

Coming up the creek, and directly in their path to safety, was a good-sized boat containing four men.

"Hully smoke!" exclaimed the two boys in a breath, as they recognized the faces of Benson, Skillings, Hague and Spratts.

Two of the rascals who were facing their way saw them at the same moment.

They uttered a shout of satisfaction.

Hague and Spratts, who were rowing, turned around and looked, too.

Then they began to row toward them as fast as they could.

CHAPTER X.

RECAPTURED.

"Make for de grass ag'in!" cried Tatters, working his oar vigorously.

Bermudas, realizing they were in a tight place, hustled as hard as he could.

"Oh, dear, what's the matter?" asked Ruth, in some amazement at the sudden change in affairs.

"You see dem fellers tryin' ter head us off. Dose two in de starn of de boat are de fellers dat kidnapped youse. De udders are dere pals. If we don't give dem de slip our name is mud, an' yer won't get home ter-day."

Ruth turned pale with apprehension as she saw the violent exertions the men were making to overtake them.

"Oh, save me!" she cried, piteously.

"Dat's wot we're tryin' ter do, Ruth, but I dunno if we kin," replied Tatters.

The boat shot into the grass once more, and they began to pole it along as hard as they could.

The rascals followed a few moments later, and it was now a blind chase, but with the chances against the pursued, nevertheless.

The crashing in the grass behind them indicated the position of their enemies, who were swearing and jabbering away at a furious rate at the trouble they were having to catch the two boys and the girl.

The superior strength of Hague and Spratts over Tatters and Bermudas made up for the greater weight and clumsiness of their boat, but the two boys managed to keep their distance, and even to increase it, for their boat drew less water and slid over spots that held up their pursuers.

The object of the boys was to work around through the grass and try to regain the creek from another point, ahead of their enemies.

They made as little noise as they could in the hope that they might thus throw their pursuers off the scent.

It is probable they would have succeeded if they hadn't run into a long tree, which blocked their way, and then the mass of branches tangled them up so badly that before they could get clear of the obstruction the other boat came upon them and the four rascals laid hold of Tatters and Bermudas with no gentle hands.

"So we've got yer at last, eh? Thought you'd give us the slip, and take the gal with yer? Now, you young vipers, how did yer know about the gal, anyway? Who told yer they was a gal aboard the canalboat? When we thought yer was unconscious I s'pose yer was playin' possum, and heard all we said in the hold. Well, it didn't do yer no good, did it?"

Thus Hague addressed the prisoners, who felt decidedly down in the mouth over their capture after all the trouble they had had in their effort to get away.

Tatters had had no chance to use the revolver hidden in his rags.

It wouldn't have availed them any if he had displayed it, as these rascals were not easily frightened by the sight of a gun.

They were accustomed to carry weapons, and use them even among themselves on slight provocation.

Having secured the two boys they left the terrified Ruth in the other boat, taking it in tow behind their own.

They soon reached the canalboat and boarded her with their prisoners.

Ruth was returned to the cabin and locked in, while Tatters and Bermudas were taken back to the hold and securely tied hand and foot to a couple of stanchions under the cabin.

"Yer welcome to get away ag'in if yer can," said Hague, derisively, as he and Spratts turned on their heel and left them to themselves.

"Dis is tough, Bermudas," said Tatters, with a glum look, which the other couldn't notice in the gloom of the after-hold.

"Dat's wot it is," agreed Bermudas. "Jest when we t'ought we wuz all right, too. It's blamed hard luck."

"An' ter t'ink I had a revolver on me all de time an' I never used it."

"A revolver, Tatters!" ejaculated Bermudas, in surprise.

"Sure. I found it in de cabin dat time I come aboard ter look for our bearin's."

"I dunno, Tatters, whedder it would'r helped us 'r not. I'm a-t'inkin' dat dey have guns demselves, an' de chances are had yer drawed it dey would have shot ye down afore yer could have pulled on dem more'n oncet. I'd radder see youse tied up erlongside'r me here dan know dat yer wuz a corpse in de marsh. I didn't see dem take de gun away from yer."

"Dey don't know dat I got it. It's hid in me clothes."

"Dat's good. It may help us out'r dis scrape yet."

"I dunno," replied Tatters, dolefully. "Dey'll watch us pretty close after dis ter see dat we don't fly de coop erg'in."

"I s'pose dey will. I feel sorry for dat girl, for she ain't used ter bein' up ag'in sich hard luck."

"Dat's wot makes me mad, Bermudas. I don't keer for myself, but I hate ter know dat she's in de power of dem toughs. Dey'll keep her now till dey work her father for dat ten t'ousand cases."

"Dat's wot dey will. An' dey'll keep us till dey get deir friend Bill clear."

Hague or Spratts came down at intervals during the day to take a look at the boys, and they never failed to jeer them over their unsuccessful attempt to get away with the girl.

About noon Hague brought them a ham sandwich apiece and a mug of water, released them from the stanchions and stood over them with a club while they ate the frugal meal.

Before they had finished, Spratts appeared with some boards, and a hammer and nails, and started in to board up that section of the hold.

He left an opening large enough to look in, and the job being finished the two rascals lifted the hatch cover up on deck and placed it over the opening.

"Dey've got us dead ter rights now, I'm t'inkin'," remarked Bermudas.

"Mebbe dey have," replied Tatters, who hadn't given up all hope yet of outwitting their enemies.

"It's er satisfaction dat we're not tied up, at any rate," said Bermudas.

Tatters thought so, too.

"Got any more matches erbout yer?" he asked.

"Sure I have."

"Den strike'r light an' let's look at dis place."

Bermudas lit a match and the two boys took a look around their narrow prison.

"Say, wot do yer call dat?" asked Tatters, pointing upward to the floor of the cabin.

"Dat looks like'r kind of scuttle."

"Dat's wot I t'ought. If it ain't fastened on de udder side we could climb t'rough inter de cabin, couldn't we?"

"Dat's right."

"Gimme er match an' I'll climb up on yer shoulders an' see whedder it's tight 'r not."

With the match in his fingers, Tatters mounted, and after striking the match he pushed against the scuttle lid.

It yielded to his touch, and the boy, in great glee, raised it cautiously an inch or two.

He was able to see the greater part of the cabin, with the door in the end, which was closed.

Ruth was standing close to the only window, looking out with tear-dimmed eyes.

After satisfying himself that she was alone in the place, Tatters raised the scuttle half up.

"Ruth!" he said, in a low tone.

She looked around, in a startled way, but did not see whence the voice had come till he called a second time.

"Tatters!" she cried, running to him.

"Hush! Don't make 'r noise. Bermudas an' me is down here. We're goin' ter try an' help yer ter-night if we kin, an' get yer away ag'in. De cabin door is fast, ain't it?"

"They nailed a piece of wood over it."

"Dey've fastened us in down here, too. Keep up yer courage, Ruth, an' if we kin find er way out'r dis old boat we're goin' ter take yer wid us if we break'r a leg, see?"

"Oh, Tatters, I know you'll help me!"

"Of course I will, an' so'll Bermudas. We'll stand by yer ev'ry time, don't yer forget it."

"You're a brave boy, Tatters, an' I trust you."

"Dat's right. Youse kin trust me an' Bermudas ter get yer out if de t'ing is ter be done."

"And then you'll come home and live with papa and mamma and I, won't you, Tatters?" eagerly.

"I'll t'ink erbout it."

"But I want you to. Won't you do it for my sake?"

"I'd do er good deal for yer sake, Ruth, but yer know I ain't not'in' but er poor barefooted kid, an' I ain't used ter nice t'ings. I wouldn't feel jest easy like in yer house, an' ev'ry time I opened me mout' I'd say somet'in' dat would be diff'rent ter wot yer wuz used ter, an' bime by yer'd be sorry yer took me in."

"No, no, Tatters! You'd soon learn to talk nicely, for I'd help you."

"I'll t'ink it over, Ruth. I must leave youse now, as Bermudas is gettin' tired holdin' me up. Just youse look for me at any time of de night. If I don't come it'll be 'cause we haven't found no way ter get out'r de hold."

With these words Tatters closed the scuttle cover, which worked on hinges, and dropped down beside his companion.

CHAPTER XI.

TATTERS DOES THE VANISHING ACT.

He was only just in time, for Hague came down into the hold a moment later and peeked through into the enclosure where the prisoners were.

"How are yer feelin' now, kids?" he asked, in joking tones.

"Wit' our fingers. How are youse feelin' yerself?" asked Tatters, saucily.

"Yer're a fresh kid, yer are, for a fact!" growled the rascal, not relishing the boy's reply.

"Wot's de matter wit' youse?" retorted the ragged youth, impudently.

"If yer give me any more of yer lip I'll fetch a club and give yer a dressin' down!" cried Hague, angrily.

"Tanks! youse kin keep de change."

"That settles it—yer get no supper to-night."

"Ain't youse got not'in' ter eat on de boat?" grinned Tatters.

"We've got plenty to eat, but yer out of it to-night."

"Well, me friend Bermudas wants somet'in'—some boned turkey or a pan roast, somet'in' delicate like dat, for he's got'r weak stommick."

"Neither one of yer will get a smell of eatin' to-night, d'ye hear?"

"Do youse t'ink I'm deaf?"

Hague glared in at his young tormentor and then left the hold, swearing loudly.

"Dat mout' of yours done us out'r our supper!" growled Bermudas.

"Mebbe it did, but I couldn't help givin' dat stuff as good as he handed out ter me. De idea of his comin' down here ter ask us how we feel, boarded up in here."

At that moment a crowd of the Night Owls came tumbling into the hold.

They lit a candle and began to indulge in a lot of horse-play.

Some of them got out cards and started a game.

One chap lit a small piece of candle he took from his pocket and came over to the partition and looked in at Tatters and Bermudas.

"Hey, fellers," he shouted to his companions, "come over and see de wild animals!"

Half a dozen of the tough boys crowded up and looked in.

"Look like a couple of Barnum's monkeys, don't dey?" one cried, derisively.

"Dat feller in de rags looks like de Whatisit," jeered another.

"Youse fellers t'ink yer funny, don't yer?" snorted Tatters, in a tone of disgust.

"Say," spoke up another, "get a pole and we'll stir up de beasts."

"Youse'll stir up not'in'," retorted Tatters. "If I wuz out dere I'd knock de daylights out of yer."

"Yer'd do wot?" snarled the other.

"Youse heard wot I said."

"I could lick yer wit' one hand and never know I wuz fightin'."

Tatters made no reply, but edging up to the hole he punched the speaker in the eye.

"Wow!" howled the fellow on the outside.

"How did yer like dat? Go back an' sit down or I'll give yer anuder, if I kin reach youse."

A chorus of oaths and threats were hurled at Tatters.

"Let's pull de place down and knock de stuffin' out'r dat chap," suggested one of the crowd.

The sudden appearance of Spratts down the hatchway caused them to scatter.

Spratts had a small jug of water and some food for the prisoners, and they were glad to get it.

"I t'ought we wasn't goin' ter get not'in' ter-night," said Tatters.

"Well, you're gettin' somethih', ain't you?"

"T'anks. Youse is all right—when yer asleep."

Then Spratts departed.

Tatters and Bermudas made a meal of what had been given them.

"Dis would be all right if we had a cup'r coffee wit' it," remarked Bermudas.

"Quit yer kickin', an' when we get out'r dis I'll take youse to Delmonico's an' blow yer to all de coffee youse kin drink," grinned Tatters.

"Wot'erbout gettin' away from dis place ter-night, Tatters?" said Bermudas. "Got any idea how yer goin' ter work it?"

"Nope. I don't t'ink we kin do anytin' ter-night."

"Yer can't get out t'rough de cabin, den?"

"Nope. De door is nailed up, so Ruth said."

"How er we goin' ter get away, den?"

"We've got'r figger it out, Bermudas. At any rate, we can't do not'in' now, so I'm going ter take a snooze."

Tatters curled himself up against the side of the boat and was soon asleep.

Bermudas followed his example and was presently in the land of dreams.

And while they slept Hague came and looked in on them.

He gave a grunt of satisfaction.

"They won't give us no trouble to-night," he muttered, turning around and leaving the hold.

The Night Owls raised cain, generally, in the fore part of the hold.

By midnight half of them was stretched out in a drunken sleep in any old corner, and the rest continued to play cards, quarrel and occasionally come to blows.

They were a tough gang, and their chief mode of picking up a living was to steal stuff from the big railroad freight yards in Jersey City.

They had been quite successful in this line of late, and were enjoying the fruits of their nefarious trade.

Tatters woke up about one o'clock and aroused his companion.

"Gimme a lift. I'm goin' ter see how t'ings are in de cabin."

Lifting the scuttle lid, he took a peep.

Ruth was lying asleep on one of the bunks.

Throwing up the lid, Tatters scrambled into the cabin. He went to the window and looked out.

The night was dark and still outside, and he easily heard the four men talking a couple of feet away.

"How did yer get on to that place, Skillings?" he heard Hague say.

"Through an old pal who is doin' time now up the river. He found out all the particulars from one of the servants who was sweet on him. He, Benson and myself were goin' to do the job three months ago, but he got caught on another lay about that time, and the judge gave him six years."

"Yer say there's lot of good stuff there waitin' to be pinched?"

"Heaps."

"Plate and jewels, I s'pose?"

"I should say so. It's stored in a strong-room off the old man's bedroom. There's a steel door with a combination lock just like a safe, but Benson has the tools here that'll walk through it like paper. In that room is a solid silver service Melville received from the Mexican government. Then there are solid gold articles that run into the thousands, and all of the old lady's diamonds and gems, said to be worth a fortune. The house itself is filled with rare old furniture and expensive bric-a-brac."

"You make my mouth water," said Spratts, who was squatting directly under the window where Tatters was listening.

"Yer say you've made up yer mind to do the job to-night?" said Hague.

"Yes. Benson found out this afternoon that the old man and his wife have gone to attend a wedding in Philadelphia and won't be back till to-morrow; and that the coachman and footman were going to take advantage of their absence to stay over night in New York. That leaves only three women servants and the gardener on the place. The gardener is an old man, and sleeps in a lodge house close to the main gate, so he won't be in the way. It's the finest chance we may ever get to crack the crib."

"And you're goin' to let us in on it, eh?" remarked Spratts.

"There's too much swag in sight for Benson and me to handle, so we've decided to take you and Hague in, on the basis of three-fifths to us and two-fifths to you two. We'll fetch the stuff right here, where we can melt the plate and hide the swag till we can get rid of it."

"We're with you, eh, Hague?" said Spratts, eagerly.

"Sure. No fear of the gal or the kids makin' any trouble for us while we're away, as we've got them secure enough now. Some of the Owls will be awake all night, anyway. I'll promise a couple of 'em a fiver apiece to keep watch. When do we start?"

"Right off. It's one now, and it'll take us an hour to reach the place," said Skillings.

"With what we get out of this thing, and the price for

returnin' the gal, we won't need to work for some time," grinned Hague.

"That's the way I figger it," chipped in Benson, getting up from his seat on a good-sized valise, which held a fine set of burglar's tools.

"Well, are you ready?" asked Skillings.

"Sure we are," replied Spratts.

"Just wait till I take a peek at those kids and pass a word or two with a couple of the Owls," said Hague, starting for the hatchway.

Tatters, on hearing this remark, left the window and dropped through the scuttle, taking care to let the lid down.

"That big stuff Hague is comin' down ter take a squint at us, Bermudas. Just curl up an' pretend yer asleep."

A few moments later Hague flashed a candle into the enclosure.

He appeared to be satisfied that the boys were fast asleep and went away.

Then he went over and held a short chat with the leader of the Night Owls, who was playing cards with two of his cronies, the three pretty well under the influence of liquor.

Tatters and Bermudas watched him through the opening in their prison until he left the hold.

"The four of 'em are goin' off ter rob a house somewhere," said Tatters to his companion.

"Yer don't say."

"I heard 'em talkin' about it on deck. It's er scheme of Skillings and Benson, the fellers dat kidnapped Ruth."

"Dose chaps are reg'lar perfeshionals, ain't dey?"

"I should t'ink dey are. Too bad we can't spile deir game."

"If de four of dem is goin' it'll be a good chance for us ter try an' skip."

"Dat's wot I wuz t'inkin'. I wuz wonderin' if I couldn't squeeze meself out'r dat cabin winder. It's kinder small, but dere's no tellin' wot a feller kin do when he's up ag'in it like we are, Bermudas."

"S'posin' yer did get out, Tatters, do yer t'ink me an' de girl could get out, too?" asked Bermudas, anxiously.

"Don't worry erbout dat. If I kin get out I guess I kin get de door open from de outside. Give me er lift up erg'in."

He climbed nimbly onto his companion's shoulders to reach the scuttle again.

Bermudas put out his foot to steady himself.

His shoe slipped on the damp wood where the water had oozed through, and the weight of Tatters on his shoulders caused him to lose his balance.

The result was that Tatters was thrown violently backward against the side of the canalboat.

There was a subdued kind of crash, like the crumbling away of decayed wood.

When Bermudas picked himself up and struck a match to see whether Tatters was hurt or not, his companion had vanished, and a gaping hole in the side of the canalboat showed where he had gone.

CHAPTER XII.

TATTERS RUTH AND BERMUDAS ESCAPE FROM THEIR PRISON ONCE MORE.

"Hully smoke!" exclaimed Bermudas, gazing vacantly at the hole in the side of the boat.

And while he looked, Tatter's face appeared, framed in the opening, with big clots of mud on it, which he was wiping off with his hand.

"Is dat youse, Tatters?" asked the astonished Bermudas.

"Betcher life it's me!" replied the ragged youth.

"Where have yer got ter?"

"Don't say er word, Bermudas," in a tone of some excitement. "I'm on de outside of de boat, in de mud."

"Why, so yer are!" replied Bermudas, now understanding the situation.

"Take a squint at de Owls, will youse, an' see if dey heard de racket."

Bermudas looked through the opening into the hold.

"Nope," he said, turning around again. "Dere's only t'ree of dem awake, playin' keerds, an' dey look half shot."

Tatters climbed back into the enclosure.

"Dat wuz a lucky tumble, Bermudas. It opened up er way for us ter fly de coop. We kin all get out t'rough dat hole as easy as winkin'. Me face got a mud bat' dat time, but wot's de odds s'long as we kin use dat way ter mosey out. Dose chaps must er gone off by dis time, so dere ain't no use of us wastin' no time. Do youse t'ink yer kin hold me up all right dis time while I go up ter de cabin an' help Ruth down de scuttle?"

"Sure I kin," replied Bermudas.

"See dat yer do, den."

Bermudas placed himself in position and Tatters mounted to his shoulders once more.

He flung open the lid and pulled himself up into the cabin.

Before waking Ruth he went to the window and listened to make sure their enemies had really gone off.

Not a sound came to him through the broken pane.

"Dey've gone all right," he said to himself. "Dere won't be a t'ing doin' when dey get back and find dat we've dusted out, too."

Then he aroused the girl.

"Is that you, Tatters?" she asked, sitting up and looking at him in a dazed kind of way.

"Dat's me all right. Are yer ready ter go home ter yer folks?"

"Oh, Tatters! Are you going to take me now?"

"Sure I am, Ruth. I've found er way ter get out'r here, an' so if youse is ready we'll start ter oncet."

"I'm ready, Tatters," she said, eagerly.

"Come on, den. Yer must get down t'rough dat scuttle. I'll hold yer, an' let yer down easy. It ain't much of er drop."

"It's so dark down there, Tatters," she said, nervously, as the boy flashed a match over the hole.

"Ain't it dark up here, too?"

"Yes, but——"

"Dat's de only way we kin get out, Ruth," he said.

"Trust yerself ter me, an' I'll see dat not'in' happens to yer."

Ruth had perfect confidence in her young protector, and so she allowed Tatters to gently lower her into the dark void below.

Holding her tightly at arms' length, he cried:

"Catch her 'round de waist, Bermudas," and Bermudas immediately grabbed Ruth and let her down easy.

Tatters followed.

After taking another peek at the three card-playing Owls in the forepart of the boat, Tatters broke away some more of the rotten wood, thus making the hole larger and easier for them to pass through.

In two minutes they were on the outside, free once more.

"When dose chaps see dat hole dey'll drop dead," remarked Bermudas, as they moved slowly away from the spot.

"Give me a boost till I git on deck an' see if de boat is dere at de stern," said Tatters.

Bermudas furnished the required boost, but hardly had Tatters got his head above the level of the deck before he dropped back again.

"Dose t'ree Owls have come up on deck," he said, "an' dey're walkin' dis way. Dat's hard luck, just when we wuz erbout to get erway."

"Let's keep on dis way," suggested Bermudas. "De ground is kinder hard. Mebbe we kin strike de pat' t'rough de swamp, an' get out'r dis place dat way."

"Go ahead," replied Tatters. "Ruth an' me'll foller."

So, with Bermudas leading the way, they traversed the entire length of the stranded canalboat.

As luck would have it, they came right upon the path which traversed the center of the marsh, and, following it, they came to the main shore.

A dark wood loomed before them, and through this they made their way, confident that they would soon strike a highway of some kind that would take them into Jersey City.

They got mixed up in the gloom of the wood, and it was some time before they came out of it onto a railroad track.

Here they paused, looked up and down the rails, quite undecided which direction to take.

"We'll go dis way," said Tatters, finally, pointing in the direction he thought Jersey City lay.

When they entered the wood Jersey City lay practically to their right, and the boys knew it, from the position of the old canalboat with relation to the bay, but in traversing the wood they unconsciously worked around toward the south while thinking they were going straight through, so when they started along the track they were walking right away from the point they were aiming for.

After an hour's walk the track swerved off to the right, and they saw a crossing a short distance ahead.

Ruth said she was tired, so they sat down to rest.

"I guess it's some distance yet ter Jersey City, don't yer t'ink?" said Bermudas.

"Sure it is."

"Wot time do yer guess dat it is?"

"I should t'ink it wuz erbout t'ree o'clock," answered Tatters.

"Will we keep ter de ties or foller de road?"

"Der road is easier. Ruth says dat dem stones between de ties hurt her feet."

It was therefore decided to go on by the road, which they did after a little while.

"Yer ain't used ter roughin' it, Ruth, are yer?" said Tatters.

The girl shook her head wearily.

"Well, keep up yer courage. It won't be long before yer'll see yer folks."

Ruth began to sob.

"Wot yer cryin' for now?"

"I'm crying because I know papa and mamma are so worried about me."

"Wot's de odds? Yer'll be home soon."

"I hope so, Tatters; but it's so dark and lonesome out here that I'm frightened."

"Dere is no reason for youse ter be skeered, Ruth. Bermudas and me is wit' yer, an' we wouldn't let not'in' hurt yer."

"I know you wouldn't, Tatters, but I can't help feeling nervous."

"I s'pose all girls are dat way. I never wuz nervous in me life. Wuz youse, Bermudas?"

"Not on yer life," replied his friend, scornfully.

They were now approaching a big mansion which set well back in its well-kept and spacious grounds.

A high wall of rough stone shut it in from the road, and in the center of it was a big, ornamental iron gate.

Close to the gate was a neat lodge house.

"I'd like ter own dat place for me summer residence," grinned Tatters.

"Yer don't want much, do yer, Tatters," replied Bermudas.

"I'm tired," said Ruth, at this point.

"Den we'll sit down an' take it easy for erwhile," said Tatters.

"How much further have we to go?" she asked.

"Dunno," replied Tatters, shaking his head. "Dis country is new ter me, Ruth."

He picked out a soft, grassy spot for her to recline on, and the three rested for perhaps half an hour.

"I wish er wagon would come erlong an' give us a lift as far as de town," remarked Bermudas. "I don't t'ink Ruth kin walk so far."

"Dat would be fine; but it's too good ter t'ink of," said Tatters.

"I've got an idea," cried Bermudas, suddenly.

"Have yer? Wot is it?"

"It must be four o'clock now. We could hang 'round here till daylight, den we could ring de bell at de gate, an' ask de folks inside ter look out for Ruth till we could go ter New York an' tell her father where she wuz. How's dat?"

"Dat ain't so bad for youse, Bermudas. Would yer like us ter to do dat, Ruth?"

Ruth did not know whether she liked the plan or not.

Finally she said if Tatters would stay with her she would be willing to remain at the house.

"Are yer willin' ter go erlone, Bermudas? I'll give yer a dollar ter pay yer way."

Bermudas scratched his head as if he didn't quite fancy the plan.

Then something happened that started their thoughts in a new direction.

An upper window of the house was thrown up suddenly, a woman's head appeared and shrill screams echoed upon the still morning air.

"Help! Help! Thieves! Help!"

"Hully gee!" exclaimed Tatters, as he and Bermudas started to their feet, and Ruth began to tremble with terror. "Wot's dat?"

"Thieves! Help! Help!"

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW TATTERS STOOD BY RUTH WARBURTON.

"Dere must be burglars in dat house," said Tatters.

"Mebbe dis is de house dat dose chaps come ter rob," said Bermudas, as the idea suddenly struck him.

"Dat's so," exclaimed Tatters. "We'd better get out'r de way. If dey see us here dey'd be de dickens ter pay. Come, Ruth, we've got ter get out'r de road. Bermudas an' me t'ink dat mebbe dem chaps, de fellers wot kidnapped yer, an' deir pals, may be 'round here, an' we don't want 'em ter see us."

The three fugitives hurried around to the end of the stone wall.

Pushing the girl well back in the shadow cast by a big oak, Tatters and Bermudas watched for further developments.

They were not long in coming, but not from the direction they expected.

Suddenly they heard the report of a gun from the direction of the gate.

A few minutes afterward there was a sound like some one scrambling upon the wall behind them, and a man's form appeared on top of it.

He leaned back toward the grounds, and when he straightened up he had a big bag in his arms which he tossed down close to Ruth's feet.

A second bag soon followed, and then a third and fourth.

The man on the wall jumped down and came face to face with the terrified girl.

"Who are you?" he demanded, roughly, pulling her forward as a second man appeared upon the wall behind.

Tatters, seeing Ruth's peril, thought of his revolver, and, drawing it, he darted forward recklessly.

"Take yer hands off her!" he shouted.

Bermudas, looking around for some weapon, spied a stout tree limb and grabbed it up.

The rascal recognized them and uttered a terrible oath.

He yanked the girl to her knees and she uttered a shrill scream.

This was more than Tatters could stand, and he fired point blank at the villain, who happened to be Skillings.

The scoundrel clapped his hand to his side and fell forward, clawing frantically at the grass.

Bermudas dashed upon Spratts, who was the second man down, and knocked him senseless with his club.

Tatters then fired at Benson, wounded him in the arm, and then turned his attention to Hague, who was still astride the fence.

That ruffian, not knowing but that they were being attacked by a couple of officers of the law, slipped back into the grounds and made his escape by a different route.

Benson also dashed away among the trees and soon disappeared.

Tatters and Bermudas were thus left masters on the field with the four bags of plunder in their possession.

It was all done so quickly that the two boys hardly realized that the danger which had menaced Ruth and themselves was over.

Ruth had fainted from sheer terror.

Skillings and Spratts lay motionless.

"Yer must'r killed dat feller," said Bermudas.

"I don't keer if I have," cried Tatters. "I had ter shoot him, for I t'ought he wuz goin' ter kill Ruth de way he handled her."

"I laid out dis chap wit' me club," said Bermudas.

At that moment they heard footsteps rapidly approaching along the side of the wall by the road.

Presently a stout old man in his shirt sleeves, with a lantern and shotgun in his hand, appeared.

"Hello, mister," shouted Tatters. "Come here."

"Surrender, you villains!" cried the newcomer, bringing his weapon to bear on the indistinct form he saw before him.

"Wot's der matter wit' youse?" cried the boy, indignantly. "We ain't no villains. We've caught 'r couple of de burglars."

"Come out and let me see who you are?" demanded the spunky old gardener of the establishment which had been robbed.

Tatters walked over to him.

"Why, you're only a boy," he said, in some astonishment, holding up the light.

"Wot of it? Come an' see wot we done."

The gardener advanced to the tree with some caution, as if he feared a trap.

"Dis is me friend, Bermudas," said Tatters. "We coppered one of dose chaps apiece, an' I guess we've saved all de swag dey wuz carryin' off."

"Why, where did this little girl come from, and what's the matter with her?"

"She's wit' us. De t'ree of us wuz kidnapped from New York day before yesterday. Say, can't we carry her up ter de house? She's fainted."

That proved to be unnecessary, for Ruth was reviving and soon sat up, much to the delight of Tatters.

Tatters then explained to the gardener that while they were sitting by the side of the road, to rest, they heard the woman's screams, and, suspecting that the four men from whom they had just escaped were robbing the house, had tried to avoid meeting them.

Then he went on to say that the rascals came suddenly upon them with their plunder, over the corner of the wall, and that he had shot Skillings in defense of Ruth, and had wounded another, who managed to get away.

"An' de udder chap I laid out meself," said Bermudas, rather proudly.

"Why, you boys look just like street gamins," said the gardener.

"They are brave and honest boys," said Ruth, coming to the front, in defense of her young champions. "This man," pointing with a shudder at the still form of the ruffian Skillings, "and another stole me from my father's house in Madison Avenue two nights ago, and were going to keep me on an old boat in the marsh near the bay until they made my father pay them \$10,000. I never could have got away from them but for Tatters——"

"Tatters!" exclaimed the gardener.

"Dat's me. I'm Tatters," said that youth.

"Upon my word, the name suits you, for you're nothing but a bundle of rags."

"Well, don't youse worry if I am. I ain't ashamed of me name."

"What's your right name?"

"Me right name is Tatters. Now youse know."

"Nonsense! That's only a nickname."

"That's all the name he has, sir," said Ruth, earnestly.

"You're joking, miss."

She shook her head very decidedly.

"What's your name, miss?"

"Ruth Warburton."

"You're not the daughter of Edward Warburton, the civil engineer, are you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is it possible!" exclaimed the gardener, flashing the light in the girl's face, who looked now anything but like the charming little miss she really was.

She had no hat.

Her dress was torn, rumpled and dirty, while her hands and face had not seen water since she was taken from her home, and her hair was tousled and unkempt.

She might easily have been taken for a child from the cheap tenements, after the experience she had just been through.

"Edward Warburton, your father, is a personal friend of Mr. Jesup, my employer, who lives in yonder house. I heard that he had a little daughter named Ruth, but who would think you were that girl!"

"She's got an uncle John, too," chipped in Tatters. "P'raps youse know him, too."

"John Warburton! Why, of course, I've seen him here many times. Miss Ruth, you must come to the house and stay till we can notify your father. Mr. and Mrs. Jesup have gone to Philadelphia, but they will be back by an early train this morning."

"Tatters must stay, too," said the little maiden, in a tone which meant that she would not take "No" for answer.

"Certainly. Tatters and——what's your name?" to Bermudas.

"Hen. Smith is me name, but I'm gen'rally called Bermudas."

"What are you called Bermudas for?"

"Coz I wuz born dere."

"You were born in the Bermuda Islands, is that it?"

"Dat's key-rect," grinned Bermudas.

"Well, you boys have done a big thing for yourselves, I'm thinking. Mr. Jesup will do something handsome for you for saving his property. My goodness!" he exclaimed, peeping into the nearest bag. "This looks like our Mexican silver-service. The villains must have broken into the strong-room."

He looked into each of the other bags, and when he had finished the examination his face was a study.

"Why, those rascals made a clean sweep. All of Mrs. Jesup's jewels are here. There's over \$100,000 worth of value in those four bags. Mr. Jesup will certainly see that you two boys are well provided for."

"My papa is going to provide for Tatters," spoke up Ruth. "He's going to live with us, and work in papa's office."

"After what he's done for you and for Mr. Jesup I guess he deserves all he'll get."

"I ain't looking for not'in'. I kin make me own way, betcher life," answered Tatters, holding up his head.

"Now, boys, I want you to help me remove these bags to the house. Do you think you could carry that small bag—the one with the jewels—Miss Ruth?"

"Yes, sir," she replied, promptly.

"Then follow me."

"Wot erbout dese fellers?" asked Tatters. "Did I kill dat chap?"

The gardener stooped down, turned Skillings over and felt of his heart.

"No, he's not dead, but I guess he's pretty badly hurt."

"He used Ruth dat rough I couldn't stand for it, an' I jest plugged him wit' a bullet. I didn't keer if I killed him, but now I'm glad I didn't."

"We'll leave them here for the police to attend to," said the gardener. "I'm going to telephone to the nearest station."

He tied them, so they could not escape.

The party took hold of the bags of plunder and marched with them into the grounds through a small iron gate beside the great entrance, and so on up the driveway to the house, where they were met by the three excited female servants who were gathered in the lower front hall talking over the robbery.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE METAMORPHOSIS OF TATTERS AND HIS FRIEND BERMUDAS.

After Edwards, the gardener, had explained the situation to the servants, Mrs. Jesup's maid took Ruth upstairs.

The bags of plunder were restored to the strong-room, the door of which had been drilled and then blown open, and left them there just as they were for Mr. Jesup to see when he came home.

Then the gardener, after telephoning to the police, took the boys down to the lodge and told them to take a good wash.

Soap and water improved the countenances of the lads wonderfully, especially Tatters, whose face had been well spattered with mud on the edge of the marsh when he made his unexpected dive through the rotten timbers of the old canalboat.

He was really a handsome boy when his light curly hair had been well brushed and the towel had got in its fine work.

"Those rags ought to be burned up, my young friend," said the gardener. "What you want is a new outfit from top to toe, with good underclothes, and you'd look like a young gentleman. You're a good-looking boy."

"T'anks. Youse is complimentary," grinned Tatters.

"Then with a new name you'd be all to the good. I suppose you're an orphan. How the dickens is it that you don't remember your real name. You must have had one once, you know."

"Mebbe I had. If I did, Caleb Tartar didn't tell me. He alwuz called me Tatters, and den de boys called me Tatters, so dat's de way I come ter be Tatters. I got used ter de name, an' I couldn't change me rags wit'out losin' me name, so I t'ought Tatters wuz better'n no name at all, so I clung ter me rags, see?"

The gardener laughed heartily at the boy's method of reasoning, then he said it was nearly five o'clock, and perhaps they'd better lie down and sleep for a couple of hours, as he intended to do that himself.

At half-past seven he took them up to the house for breakfast, introduced them into the roomy kitchen, which looked as bright and clean as a new pin.

The cook provided them with what Tatters declared to be the swellest breakfast he ever had in his life, and Bermudas was equally impressed by it.

"Dis is as good as Delmonico's, betcher life," he said to his friend, as they cleaned their plates the second time, and polished off two cups of good coffee. "Portugee Joe couldn't get up not'in' like dis, could he, Tatters?"

"I should t'ink not," replied the ragged youth, emphatically.

While they were eating, the maid came in and said that Miss Ruth was in bed asleep, and that she wasn't going to awaken her before nine.

After breakfast two policemen came to the house and interviewed everybody.

The coachman and footman, who had been all night in New York at a social gathering, returned about eight o'clock.

When they heard that the house had been entered by thieves during the early morning hours, they nearly dropped.

They knew they shouldn't have left the premises while their employer and his wife were away, and they trembled for their situations.

Later on they started with the carriage for the Pennsylvania Railroad depot in Jersey City to meet the ten o'clock train from Philadelphia.

Mr. and Mrs. Jesup reached home about eleven o'clock, and then they heard all the details of the burglary.

Ruth Warburton and her young champions, Tatters and Bermudas, were presented to the wealthy retired civil engineer and his wife.

"Is it possible that you are the daughter of Edward Warburton, of Madison Avenue, New York?" exclaimed Mr. Jesup in surprise.

"Yes, sir," replied Ruth.

"Why, there was an account in yesterday's paper of your mysterious disappearance from home night before last. Where have you been?"

Ruth told her story, calling on Tatters to fill up the missing links.

She told how the boys had tried to escape with her from the old canal hulk by boat, how they had got lost and spent all night in the marsh, and how they had been recaptured next morning.

Then she told about their escape that morning, their long walk through the wood and over the railroad ties, and finally the thrilling encounter with their enemies, the burglars.

The story told by Tatters was even more graphic, and the Jesups regarded the ragged boy with considerable interest.

"Miss Ruth," said Mr. Jesup, suddenly jumping to his feet, "I must telephone your father that you are safe and at our home. You must remain here, of course, until he comes for you."

Mr. Warburton had a telephone in his house, and Mr. Jesup soon connected with the Madison Avenue house.

Ruth's father, his brother John and a detective were in consultation in the library when the call came, and John Warburton answered it.

What he heard over the wire caused him to shout to his brother:

"Ruth is all right, Edward. She is with the Jesups on the Midland Road."

Edward Warburton rushed up and grabbed the receiver. He wanted full particulars from Mr. Jesup, who was at the other end of the wire.

"Why, John, that Tatters boy, you lost in the crowd Tuesday on East Broadway, is with her, and so is another boy named Henry Smith."

"Is that so?" replied John, greatly surprised.

"My heavens, John, it is just as we feared—Ruth was abducted, and her escape from the scoundrels is entirely due to Tatters. God bless Tatters! That boy shall never want for a friend as long as I live."

"Nor as long as I live, either," said John Warburton.

"Run upstairs, John, and tell Lydia that Ruth is safe and is with the Jesups in New Jersey."

While his brother was away, Edward learned a few of the more important particulars about his daughter's hard experience since she was spirited from home.

He also learned about the burglary at the Jesup home, and the great service Tatters had rendered in saving the valuable contents of the strong-room, which had been looted by the rascals.

"This Tatters is a most astonishing boy for his age," said Mr. Jesup over the wire. "He is as bright as a new tin pan, and smart—well, don't say a word! Ruth insists that you are going to take him in hand and bring him up. Well, you have the first claim on him if you wish to exercise it. If you don't, I shall adopt him myself, providing, of course, he is willing to give up his questionable freedom. His talk is the language of the slums, and it will be quite a contract to break him into a new line of life, but he's young and, once properly started, he'll come around all right. He has the making of a fine man, and he looks as if he came from good stock. I am afraid we shall never learn his true origin, unless the information is known to a man he calls Caleb Tartar, around whom his earliest recollection centers."

Before Mr. Warburton had finished his talk with his friend Jesup, his brother John returned to the library and dismissed the detective with a check for services rendered.

"I'm going out to Jesup's place at once," said Edward Warburton, as he hung up the receiver.

"And I'll go with you," replied John promptly. "I'll call up Gibson's stables and order a rig to be sent around at once."

Out at Jesup's Tatters and Bermudas were having the time of their lives.

They were sent to the nearest outfitters in company with Edwards, the gardener, and Tatters's rags and Bermudas's shabby garments were replaced by fine new suits, with hats,

shoes and stockings and underclothing to match, not forgetting collars and neat ties.

When Tatters was dressed and led in front of a looking-glass he didn't know himself.

"Say, cully," he said to the salesman, "is dis me, or is it er pipe dream?"

"It's you, all right," laughed the gardener.

"Say, dese shoes hurt me feet. I never kin wear 'em."

"You'll get used to them soon. If you're going to live with Miss Ruth you can't go around barefooted."

"I s'pose dat's er fact," replied Tatters, with something like a sigh, as he saw the clerk gingerly carry his old rags to the back door and throw them out.

"Dere goes me name," the boy said, regretfully. "I ain't Tatters no more."

"Youse are a swell of de first water now," said Bermudas. "An' just look at me new togs, too! De gang'll never know me when I show up. I dunno wot I'm goin' ter do wit'out yer, Tatters," in a gloomy tone.

"I guess you won't go back to New York, Smith," said the gardener.

"Why not?"

"Mr. Jesup is going to give you a situation on his place."

"Wot! Yer don't mean it?"

"I heard him say so."

"Yer did? An' kin I see Tatters once in a while?"

"I have no doubt but you will. He can come here and call on you, and you can go and see him after he gets accustomed to his new home."

"Oh, say, Tatters, wot do yer t'ink er dat?" in high glee.

"I'll let youse know later, Bermudas," answered Tatters, who wasn't certain by any means that the new life that was being mapped out for him would fill the bill to his thorough satisfaction.

When the gardener brought the two boys back to the Jesup mansion, their appearance created a small sensation—they were so changed.

Ruth was so astonished with the transformation in Tatters especially that she couldn't believe at first that it was really him.

"Don't youse know me, Ruth?" he asked, now doubly regretting the loss of his familiar rags.

"Why, it is you, Tatters, isn't it?" she said, clapping her hands and laughing with pleasure.

"Sure it's me. Who else 'ud it be?"

"Why, how handsome you look now. Doesn't he, Mr. Jesup?"

The old civil engineer admitted a fact that was patent to all.

"Quite a little gentleman," he said, with a smile.

The boys were introduced to an elegant bathroom, where they were told to give themselves a thorough bathing.

Shortly afterward they sat down in company with Ruth and their hosts to a dinner, which Tatters declared to Bermudas in a whisper was clean out of sight.

Of course they felt decidedly awkward under the circum-

stances, but Mr. and Mrs. Jesup, seconded by Ruth, did all they could to put them at their ease.

After the meal Mr. Jesup carried them off to his library. "Now, boys," he said, "I want to have a talk with you. I believe it is decided that you, Tatters—I must call you by that name still, as you have no other yet—are to live with Mr. Edward Warburton, who, in gratitude for the service you have rendered Ruth, is going to assume the responsibility of your future. Now I owe you a considerable obligation for the service you did for me this morning. You, with your friend, Henry Smith, saved property of ours worth, at a low estimate, \$150,000. As an evidence of my gratitude I am going to hand Mr. Warburton my check for \$25,000 to be deposited for your future benefit in some bank he will select for that purpose. It will have doubled in value by the time you arrive at age, and will be a nice nest egg for you to begin life with."

Tatters was too much astonished to say a word.

"As for you, Smith," said Mr. Jesup, turning to Bermudas, "I'm going to look out for your future myself, if you have no objection. I'm going to deposit \$25,000 in a New York bank to your credit, and I'm going to employ you about my place here as general assistant to the gardener and in the stable. After a few months, if you prove worthy, I shall send you to a good boarding-school, where you will get the education you need. It is not impossible," put in the engineer, as an enticement, "that you and your friend, Tatters, will go to the same school together."

Bermudas's eyes opened very wide, and he grinned at Tatters, who responded in the same way.

Mr. Jesup saw that the lads were beginning to wake up to the new life that was before them.

CHAPTER XV.

TATTERS AND BERMUDAS BEGIN A NEW LIFE.

Shortly afterward Edward and John Warburton drove up to the mansion.

The meeting between father and daughter was very affecting.

Then Tatters and Bermudas came in for their share of attention.

"I should never have known you, Tatters," said Edward Warburton, grasping the boy warmly by the hands. "You look so different in good clothes. We shall have to find a name for you now, and I hope a thorough investigation of your past will bring your real name to sight."

"Mebbe Caleb Tartar knows it," said Tatters, doubtfully.

"Who is Caleb Tartar?"

"He's de man dat keeps de Water Street lodgin'-house, where Bermudas an' me slept nights. I used ter live wif him in Cherry Hill when I wuz a little kid, but I shook him, 'cause he licked me an' made me work for not'in'."

"I shall make it my business to call on this man Tartar. I shall make it worth his while to tell all he knows about you. It is to be hoped that we'll be able to find out something about your parentage."

"Dat feller 'll do anyt'in' for money," replied Tatters.

"In the meantime I want you to come home with Ruth and I, and I hope you will be satisfied to fall in with my views respecting your future. I want to educate you first of all, and then we'll see what will come next."

Tatters agreed to go with his new friend, especially as the prospect of being Ruth's companion was enticing to him.

The new clothes had already worked a revolution in his feelings and sentiments.

He felt of more importance in the world, and realized that he couldn't go back to his old life any more, which, with all its boasted freedom, was a hard one.

When the time came to part from each other, Tatters and Bermudas showed symptoms of gloom, but being assured they should meet often became reconciled to the situation.

"Good-bye, Tatters," shouted Bermudas, as the team drove out of the big gate. "I'll look ter see youse over here soon."

"Dat's right, Bermudas," replied his friend. "Youse'll see me, all right."

Then the carriage drove off down the direction Ruth and the two boys had come in the early hours of the morning.

"Ain't youse goin' ter Jersey City?" asked Tatters.

"Certainly," replied John Warburton, who was driving. "This is the road there."

"Is dat er fact? Den Ruth an' me an' Bermudas wuz walkin' in de wrong direction."

"You certainly were. Every step you took carried you further away from the point you were aiming at. It is fortunate, however, that you went astray, otherwise those rascals would have got away with Mr. Jesup's property."

"How erbout dat chap I shot? He ain't dead, is he?"

"No. He's in the hospital and will recover. Then he'll be tried for his crimes, and he'll not get less than twenty years."

"An' de udder feller—de one Bermudas knocked on de nut?"

"He's in jail safe enough."

"Heard anyt'in' erbout de udders? Me an' Bermudas told de police all erbout dat canalboat in de marsh, an' de Night Owls, an' everyt'in'."

"No. But you may be sure the gang will be broken up and most of them arrested. We shall hear all about it in a day or two."

Tatters received a warm reception from Mrs. Warburton who, as one may well believe, was overjoyed to have Ruth back again—safe and unhurt.

It was a new experience for Tatters to have a nicely furnished little room all to himself, and a bed that, in his eyes, looked fit for a king.

"I wonder if I won't wake up in de mornin' an' find

meself at Caleb Tartar's, and dat all dis fine time I'm havin' wuz only er dream."

On the following day Tatters was produced in court by his benefactor and was excused for his non-appearance against the men who robbed Mr. Warburton.

Tatters soon found out that his good fortune did not spring from a dream, but that it was the real thing.

He and Ruth had a fine time together, and seemed to thoroughly enjoy each other's society.

On Friday they had to go to Jersey City to appear at the examination of Spratts and half a dozen of the Night Owls who had been taken into custody.

Here they met Bermudas, who had also been required to appear to give evidence against the lawbreakers.

"Well, Tatters," grinned his old friend, "how's t'ings wit' youse?"

"Finer dan silk. How are youse gettin' on?"

"I'm livin' on de fat of der land, betcher life," replied Bermudas, enthusiastically. "Dat's er swell job dat I got. De cook tickles me palate ter de queen's taste. Never lived so high in me life."

"I don't t'ink I'd care ter shine 'em up any more," said Tatters, beamingly.

"I guess not. I'm goin' ter have me own private boot-black one of dese days."

"I get me shoes shined in de barber-shop ev'ry mornin'," said Tatters, with a chuckle. "I'm gettin' used ter wearin' 'em now, but dey felt kinder funny at de start off. Just like as if me feet wuz bandaged up."

"Well, youse look fine dese days, Tatters," said Bermudas, looking his friend all over from his hat to his shoes. "Wot a diff'rence since dat mornin' we wuz playin' craps on de pile er bricks in Front Street. We don't seem like de same fellers."

"Dat's right, Bermudas. It seems like er dream."

"De gang must be wonderin' wot's become of us."

"I'll bet dey are."

"If we wuz ter walk down on Water Street ter-night in dese glad rags, hully smoke, what 'ud dey t'ink!"

"Dey'd t'ink we'd gone inter de bankin' bizness."

"I'd like ter see Butts," said Bermudas, a bit wistfully.

"So 'ud I. An' Billy Moss, an' Tommy Dodd."

Their further confidences were cut short by the entrance of the judge, and soon afterward Spratts was called to the bar.

Ruth gave her testimony first, and then Tatters was called.

"You solemnly swear that the evidence you are about to give is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth," rattled off the clerk. "Kiss the book."

Tatters obeyed.

"What's your name?"

"Tatters," replied the youth, glibly.

"What's that? I didn't understand you," asked the clerk, while the judge looked hard at the well-dressed, handsome boy.

"I said me name wuz Tatters," replied the lad, in the dialect of the slums.

His reply, coupled with the great contrast between his speech and his appearance, created a stir in the court.

"What's your first name?"

At this point John Warburton rose and asked to be allowed to make an explanation to His Honor.

He was permitted to do so.

In a low tone, not audible to the curious spectators, Mr. Warburton told the judge that the boy had no other name at present, that he had only just been rescued from the slums, and that his evidence could be depended on.

The examination then proceeded, Tatters being addressed as Master Tatters.

The lawyer hired by Spratts, however, took advantage of the situation to try and discredit the boy's testimony, on the ground of his past life.

He did not succeed in convincing the judge, or anybody else, for that matter, that Tatters was not a competent and reliable witness.

The same tactics were pursued with Bermudas when he came to the stand, but failed just as signally.

The result was that Spratts was remanded for the action of the Grand Jury.

The half-dozen Night Owls were treated in a more summary manner.

They were found guilty offhand, and sentenced to three years apiece in the Reformatory.

"Serves dem right," remarked Bermudas, as he parted at the door of the court from Ruth and Tatters. "Dese fellers ain't no good for not'in'."

"Dat's right," replied Tatters. "Dey called us wild animals when dey looked in on us while we wuz pris'ners in dat canalboat, an' wanted ter stir us up wit' er pole. Now dey are gettin' it in de neck, an' I ain't sorry for a cent."

CHAPTER XVI.

TATTERS'S STRUGGLE FOR LIFE.

On Monday of the following week Edward and John Warburton went down to Water Street to find Caleb Tartar, and have a talk with him.

While they were away, Tatters and Ruth went up to Central Park.

They went to see the animals first, and spent an hour around the cages.

"Dat monkey in de corner puts me in mind er Caleb Tartar," chuckled Tatters.

"Oh, Tatters!" exclaimed Ruth, with a merry laugh. "You don't mean that."

A man in bushy whiskers who was loitering near the cages looked up suddenly in a startled way as he heard the foregoing, and then bent a sharp look on the boy's face particularly.

Ruth and Tatters soon walked off up a pathway, and the man with the whiskers followed after them.

For half an hour they kept to the paths, but finally they turned off among the rocks that led to the lake, and the man was still behind them.

In the vicinity of the big lake there are lots of secluded nooks, and lonesome-looking spots overlooking the water, that make a stroller in the park forget, for the moment, that he is in the midst of a great city.

Tatters and Ruth wandered through grottoes, over rustic bridges, through by-lanes whose dense foliage made a sort of twilight within them, and so on till they came out upon a stony place in a sheltered nook of the lake.

"Ain't it lonesome here, Ruth?" said Tatters, as they stood admiring the rude natural beauty of the spot.

"Yes. You wouldn't think we were so near Fifth Avenue as we are. Looks like some wild spot in the Catskills."

At that moment they heard a step behind them, and, turning, discovered the man with the bushy, black whiskers coming toward them.

"Do you think he has been following us, Tatters?" asked Ruth, nervously.

"Wot makes youse t'ink dat, Ruth?" asked her companion, with a sidelong glance at the stranger.

"Because I've noticed him behind us almost all the time since we left the menagerie."

"Well, he'd better not butt in, dat's all I got'r say," said Tatters, aggressively.

"Let's get away from here. He might attack us here, and nobody would be the wiser," said Ruth, in a frightened tone.

"Don't youse worry. I kin take keer of yer," replied the boy, confidently.

"Do come away," she begged.

"All right, if youse want'r. Wotever yer say goes wit' me."

They turned to retrace their steps, but the man with the black whiskers blocked their path.

"Wot's der matter wit' youse?" demanded Tatters, trying to push the man aside.

"Not much," answered the man, shortly. "Only I've got a bone to pick with yer. That's all."

"Yer have not'in' ter pick wit' me. I don't know youse."

"Oh, yer don't?" replied the man with a sarcastic laugh.

"Well, I know yer, all right, even if yer have new togs on. Yer Tatters, the Water Street kid."

"S'pose I am Tatters. Who are youse?"

"Yer want to know, do yer. Well, look and see, you little imp, afore I throw yer into the lake, as I'm goin' to do right away."

He removed his false whiskers and stood revealed as Hague.

Ruth recognized him at once, and uttered a scream.

"Shut your trap, yer little vixen!" cried Hague, furiously, grabbing her by the arm.

"Hands off dat girl," cried Tatters, striking Hague in the face a blow that staggered him.

The man swore a great oath and, grappling with the boy, tried to force him over the rocks toward the water, which looked deep and dark at this spot.

"I'm goin' to close yer mouth for good, yer little imp," he cried hoarsely. "Yer give evidence ag'in my pal, Spratts, last week. And yer mean to do the same ag'in Skillings when he's brought up. And ag'in my other pal, Bill, whose game yer queered that mornin' in Front Street. I'm goin' to fix yer so yer won't be on hand when yer called. I'm goin' to kill yer!" fiercely.

Tatters, however, was a strong boy for his years, and he put up a stubborn resistance.

Ruth, too, grasped Hague's coat and pulled for all she was worth.

The rascal shook her off, and then pushed Tatters almost to the edge of the pool, where he fell on top of the boy, and the struggle continued with desperate earnestness, while Ruth, finding she could do nothing, screamed repeatedly.

The man and boy rolled about, and Tatters squirmed so that Hague was unable to accomplish his object.

At last he thought he had Tatters, and he was anxious to finish the job, for he knew that the girl's screams were bound to attract attention to the spot.

So he made a sudden and powerful effort to push the boy over into the water.

At that moment Tatters, who was as agile as a monkey, wriggled under him and he fell over on his side.

Tatters kicked him in the shins and pushed him away.

Hague slipped in his effort to recover himself.

Then he felt he was falling, and made a frantic grasp at the rocks.

His feet went down over the edge of the rocks and pulled his body with them.

He disappeared from Tatters's sight like a shot.

There was a splash in the water and then silence.

Two pedestrians, who had heard Ruth's shrieks, came running into the break of the rocks as Tatters scrambled to his feet.

"What's the trouble?" asked one of them.

Ruth, as pale as a ghost, could only point at Tatters.

The strangers walked to him.

"What have you been doing?" they first demanded.

"Been havin' de fight of me life," replied Tatters. "He's down dere."

And the boy pointed to the water, but there was no sign of Hague.

"Who's down there?"

"De feller dat tried to t'row me inter de lake."

Looking down, the men just made out the ghastly face of the villain, lying two feet below the surface.

He had struck his head on a rock and become unconscious.

"My heavens!" exclaimed one of the strangers. "How can we get him out?"

The rocks went down in a sheer incline, which made Hague's rescue, under the circumstances, impossible.

The rascal was as good as dead, and he deserved his fate.

"He's a goner," said the other stranger. "We can't reach him, to save our lives."

"Come on, boy, this is a case for the police to settle."

"It wuzn't my fault, all right. Ask Ruth."

Thus appealed to, Ruth, now recovered from her fright, told the story of how the man had attacked Tatters and tried to throw him into the water, and how he had slipped over himself.

The strangers listened as they walked along.

They were inclined to believe her story and to exonerate the boy of wrong, but they felt that they had no right to pass judgment on so serious a case, so they turned both of the young people over to the park police, who heard the story, and decided to detain Ruth and Tatters for further investigation.

Hague's body was recovered, and taken to the station near the menagerie.

Edward Warburton who, by that time, had returned to his house, was notified by telephone at Tatters's request.

He came up to the park at once, and after he had heard all about the trouble he communicated with a well-known official with whom he was acquainted, and who lived near by, and the result was Ruth and Tatters were paroled in his custody to appear at court next day.

We may as well say, right here, that at the examination which followed Tatters was relieved of all blame for the death of Hague, who was identified by the police as a crook whose picture was in the Rogues' Gallery.

That night, however, there was a very important conference at the Warburton home.

Tatters was told that Caleb Tartar had been induced to reveal all he knew about him.

The boy's right name was George Lovett.

His father, Arthur Lovett, had married a typewriter in his own father's employ, and had been cast off by the family, a well-known and much respected one, in consequence.

Arthur Lovett, after a hard struggle with the world, died, leaving his wife with their little boy in comparative poverty.

Sickness prevented her from taking a position to support herself and her child, and she drifted to the poorest section of Cherry Street, where she became acquainted with Caleb Tartar.

When she found she was going to die, she begged Caleb to look after her boy.

He promised to do so, and she died and was buried in Potter's Field.

Then Caleb Tartar proceeded to bring George Lovett up in a way that should turn to his own particular advantage.

For fear that the family of the boy's father would learn about the child and take him away, Caleb suppressed the lad's name and called him simply Tatters, which suited well with the clothes he furnished the unfortunate little orphan.

That was all, but it was enough to establish the boy's identity, and his right to an honored name.

Subsequently, his grandparents were induced to recognize him, but that was not till some years afterward, when education and refinement had worked their change in the handsome, bright lad.

Mr. Warburton sent him away to a military academy in New Jersey, and Bermudas went with him, at Mr. Jesup's expense.

They graduated together, two of the brightest students of the school, and were then sent to Princeton College.

When they had completed their schooling, Henry Smith, or as we have known him—Bermudas, began the study of civil engineering under Mr. Jesup's patronage.

George Lovett—no longer Tatters, the boy of the slums—followed his example, and now occupies a responsible position in Edward Warburton's office.

He doesn't live with his old protector any more, but in the immediate neighborhood.

He calls frequently at the Madison Avenue home, and the impression prevails that he will soon marry Ruth Warburton, one of the loveliest of this season's debutantes.

As soon as he and Bermudas are of age they expect to get possession of the \$25,000 apiece given to them by Mr. Jesup.

As for Ruth, she is proud of her young intended, and thinks there isn't another young man like him in the world, but when she wishes to tease him she assumes a roguish air and calls him "Tatters."

THE END.

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